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"Full of excellent humour and irony, admirably interpreted."—*Punch*, 1923.

"Begins in excitement and keeps it up all through ; frankly I enjoyed 'Our Ostriches'."—*Sunday Times*, 1923.

"Every bit as thrilling and exciting as the best constructed melodrama."—*Daily Herald*, 1923.

"Written with passionate sincerity, much plain speaking, but nothing to harm anyone."—*Morning Post*, 1923.

"Lucid, reasoned and interesting."—*Observer*, 1923.

"The scene in which this Commission so lamely but amusingly functions is quite the best in the play."—*Daily Telegraph*, 1930.

"The Commission scenes held the attention of the house, and were one more proof of the fact that lengthy discussions *can* be at least as exciting as burglaries and murders."—*Daily Herald*, 1930.

"The author has a sense of humour that redeems her work from tedious fanaticism."—*Evening News*, 1930.

"The authoress reveals a rather unexpected sense of humour in her drawing of the Royal Commissioners who interminably investigate the birth-control question. They are exaggerated types, but definitely recognisable, and the mannerisms of Mr. Kinsey Peile as the episcopal chairman are an everlasting joy to observe. Mr. Frederick Leister also acts remarkably well as the Catholic priest, Brother Peter, and Miss Norah Robinson puts any amount of conviction into her rendering of the part of that enthusiastic slummer and eugenisist, Evadne Carrillon."—*Yorkshire Post*, 1930.

"The enthusiasm put by Dr. Marie Stopes into her contraceptive crusade is of the kind that moves mountains. This headstrong comedy of hers is filled with the joy of battle. It positively sings with combative ecstasy."—*Observer*, 1930.

"This is a play of pluck and pleading for a momentous cause, and, whatever the effect, the author, Mrs. Marie Stopes, deserves credit for her rugged candour. For over-population is the direct cause of our national malady—unemployment."—*Sketch*, 1930.

"Speaking of myself, I can only say that seldom, if ever, have I been so moved in heart and mind. The sufferings of poor, ignorant, heroic motherhood have, it seems to me, never been set forth with more appealing and soul-moving power. There was passion in the 'propaganda' which was heart-compelling to the last degree."—Country Parson in the *Nation and Athenæum*, 1930.

OUR OSTRICHES

OUR OSTRICHES

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

DR. MARIE STOPES

LONDON

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

24 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

First Published 1923
2nd Edition - 1930

Made in Great Britain
The Botolph Printing Works
8, Gate Street, Kingsway, W.C.2

The Play

was first produced at

The Royal Court Theatre, London

ON

Wednesday Evening 14th Nov., 1923, at 8.30,

*With the following in the original cast
in order of their appearance :*

Lady Carlon ... ..	...	...	...	...	ETHEL ROYALE
Lord Simplex ... ..	...	...	...	...	HAROLD ANSTRUTHER
Brother Peter (of the Earlyan Brotherhood) ...	...	...	...	...	ROY BYFORD
Evadne Carrillon ... ..	...	...	...	...	DOROTHY HOLMES-GORE
Mrs. Carrillon (her Mother) .. ..	...	...	...	...	WINIFRED EVANS
Dr. Verro Hodges . . . .	...	...	...	...	LEO G. CARROLL
Hettie Ross ... ..	...	...	...	...	DOROTHY HALL
Mrs. Flinker ... ..	...	...	...	...	MINNIE RAYNER
Teddy	Mrs. Flinker's Children	{	...	ARTHUR WILLISON	
Dicky			...	LEONARD JOHNSON	
Violet			...	MARIE BUDDEN	
Annie			DOROTHY BARRY FURNISS		
Tommy			...	HORACE BARBERO	
Twinney			...	ELSIE BECK	
Professor Beverley Black ... ..	...	...	...	...	FRED W. PERMAIN
Bishop of Chelmgate (Chairman of Commission)	...	...	...	...	KINSEY PEILE
Lady Highkno ... ..	...	...	...	...	ETHEL GRIFFIEE
Sir Theodore Ravage (Government Representative on Commission) ..	...	...	...	...	ARTHUR BURNS
Bishop of Oxbridge ... ..	...	...	...	...	WILLIAM KERSHAW
Mrs. Sweetholm ... ..	...	...	...	...	KATIE JOHNSON
Reverend Godfrey Pritchard ... ..	...	...	...	...	NOEL SHAMMON
Mr. Nathaniel Facer (Secretary of Commission)	...	...	...	...	ARTHUR EWART

The Play produced by REGINALD BACH

ROYALTY THEATRE

DEAN STREET, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.

Revived May 1930

Characters in the order of their appearance :

Lady Carlon	AILSA GRAHAME
Lord Simplex	VICTOR DILL
Brother Peter (of the Earlyan Brotherhood)	FREDERICK LEISTER
Evadne Carrillon	NORAH ROBINSON
Mrs. Carrillon	ELIZABETH CHESNEY
Dr. Verro Hodges	MARTIN LEWIS
Mrs. Flinker	CLARE GREET
Teddy	STELLA LAVINE
Dicky	PERCY PARKINS
Violet	VERA FRY
Annie	AUDRIE TAYLOR
Tommy	H. HASKALL
Twinny	EILEEN SIMMONS
Mrs. Hettie Ross	HELEN GOSS
Prpfessor Beverley Black	FRED W. PERMAIN
Bishop of Chelmgate (Chairman of Commission)	KINSEY PEILE
Lady Highkno	MAY HAYSAC
Sir Theodore Ravage (Government Representative on Commission)	FREDERICK ANNERLEY
Bishop of Oxbridge	JULIAN BAINBRIDGE
Mrs. Sweetholm	KATIE JOHNSON
Reverend Godfrey Pritchard	ARTHUR VEZIN
Mr. Nathaniel Facer (Secretary of Commission)	ARTHUR EWART

Owing to L.C.C. Regulations all Children in this Play have to be over the age of 14 years.

The Play produced by REGINALD BACH

LIST OF CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

MISS EVADNE CARRILLON (The Heroine).

MRS. CARRILLON (Her Mother).

LORD SIMPLEX (Her Fiancé).

BROTHER PETER (Priest of the Earlyan Brotherhood).

DR. VERRO HODGES.

LADY CARFON.

HETTIE ROSS (Mrs. Flinker's neighbour).

MRS. FLINKER.

TOMMY FLINKER (aged 14)

ANNIE FLINKER (aged 13)

DICKIE FLINKER

TEDDY FLINKER

VIOLET FLINKER

TWINNY FLINKER

Younger
Children

Mrs. Flinker's Children.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE.

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE.

LADY HIGHKNO.

MRS. SWEETHOLM.

THE REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD.

MR. NATHANIEL FACER.

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK.

TIME : The Present : to be exact, 1923.

PLACE : London or any great city.

ACTION

ACT I. SCENE I. The Park ; a spring afternoon.

ACT II. { SCENE I. A tenement room.
(*following on*)
(*Two days elapse*)
SCENE II. The same, two days later.

(*Two months elapse*)

ACT III. { SCENE I. The Library, Commission House.
The Commission in session.
SCENE II. The same, an hour later.

ACT I

BACK CLOTH TREES IN PARK

ACT I.

PARK CHAIRS

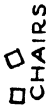


FOLIAGE etc.
IN WINGS

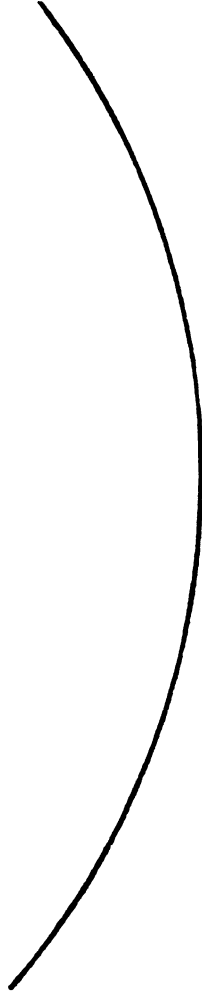
FOLIAGE &
RHODODENDRONS
IN FLOWER
IN WINGS



BUILT UP TREE



CHAIRS



ACT I

Front curtain painted to represent the Park in spring ; rhododendrons flowering. A few chairs. The actors stroll to and fro as in the Park.

Time : Afternoon on a spring day.

LADY CARFON and BROTHER PETER discovered.

LADY CARFON : *Tall, elegant, Society woman, very smartly dressed and rather passée, cynical and heartless.*

BROTHER PETER : *Stout, elderly, rubicund priest, dark hair and blue-black about the jaws, jovial, but beneath a surface of kindly joviality, ruthless. He wears a long black coat and the hat peculiar to his brotherhood which does not actually exist ; and is therefore of a special type.*

Discovered as curtain rises, LORD SIMPLEX, BROTHER PETER, LADY CARFON. LORD SIMPLEX saying "Good-bye."

LORD SIMPLEX (L). Goodbye, Lady Carfon.

LADY CARFON. Goodbye, Lord Simplex.

LORD SIMPLEX (L). Goodbye, Brother Peter.

BROTHER PETER (*crosses to SIMPLEX and back to LADY CARFON*). Goodbye, my boy, delighted to have seen you. (*Whispers knowingly.*) Wish you luck.

LORD SIMPLEX. Oh, that's all right.

(LORD SIMPLEX *exits* L.)

LADY CARFON. Lord Simplex is one of your flock, is he not, Brother, so I suppose you know all about his affair of the heart ?

BROTHER PETER (*on her R, laughing deprecatingly and shaking his hands as though pushing away the suggestion*).

No, no, no. No more than ordinary lay eyes can see of an obviously suitable attachment. (*Sits R chair under tree.*)

LADY CARFON (*sighing*). Lucky Mrs. Carrillon. Evadne could have waited better than most girls.

BROTHER PETER (*sits on her R*). But I am glad Lord Simplex is making so good a choice. It was very obvious——

LADY CARFON (*breaking in*). Well, Brother Peter, I suppose *my* poor girls do not get any of your sympathy. I must say it is rather hard when they are inside the fold and Evadne is not.

BROTHER PETER (*with a knowing twinkle*). But it's better surely to look outside the fold. They will bring in the unconverted. That will increase the flock.

LADY CARFON. Oh, but you would encourage——

BROTHER PETER. Well, missionary work is most admirable service.

(*THEY rise on EVADNE'S entrance.*)

THEY both laugh. EVADNE and MRS. CARRILLON coming out from the opposite side R. THEY smile, come towards each other and greet.

EVADNE is a graceful girl of about twenty-three years, fresh, tastefully dressed, quite heart-whole and light-hearted, attractively superficial and cool in her whole attitude throughout this scene but with serious eyes and a well-balanced rather intellectual face, suggesting the possibility that once she is stirred there may be depths in her not yet represented.

MRS. CARRILLON, her mother, a fashionable Society woman, well-dressed, successful, "sweet" to everybody because she knows it is the safest thing to be.

MRS. CARRILLON says, "How do you do? Lovely day," and shakes hands; standing centre in a group. BROTHER PETER. EVADNE goes up C.

EVADNE. Hello, Lady Carfon, here again? Aren't you all bored with the Park?—I am. (*Yawns.*)

LADY CARFON (L). Evadne! Just when life is coming freshly clad to everything?

EVADNE. Yes, bores me. Same old Park, same old gravel, just scratched up again, same people that I met last night, just looking rather tired instead of as gay as they did at the dance.

(LADY CARFON *looks almost offended but cynically amused.*)

MRS. CARRILLON (*on EVADNE'S R rather shocked*). My wicked child has a good memory, and she knows that she did not meet *you* at the dance last night, Lady Carfon; that is why she dares to say such TERRIBLE things.

(BROTHER PETER *passes behind them C to R.*)

LADY CARFON. Oh, I know the poses of youth. I expect she was never more excited in her life than she is to-day. (*SHE looks knowingly at EVADNE.*)

BROTHER PETER (R. *Rubs his hands*). We old folk know the thin shells under which youth hides.

EVADNE (*petulantly*). Shells, pretence, rubbish! I am bored.

LADY CARFON (*impishly*). Was not Lord Simplex at the dance?

EVADNE (*looking straight at her*). Yes, he was, as you well know, Lady Carfon, and I expect he will be in the Park looking less brilliant than he did last night.

(*Crosses to L.*)

LADY CARFON and MRS. CARRILLON (*simultaneously*). Hopeless!

(LADY CARFON *crosses to MRS. CARRILLON and BROTHER PETER R.*)

MRS. FLINKER *heard off singing "Pat on the back" enters, pushing an old pram.*

She is a fat, florid woman of an indefinite appearance, but really about forty years old, whose clumsy skirt hangs unevenly at the hem, her blouse tucked in irregularly at the waist. The top ridge of her corsets shows both back and front. On her untidy screw of hair a man's cap is stuck sideways with a long pin stuck rakishly through it. Her cuffs are undone, one sleeve half rolled up. Her three ragged children are with her, one dragging to her skirt and sucking a dirty thumb and the others struggling along. Their noses run, their mouths hang open, and their voices are shrill.

MRS. FLINKER (*enters, singing cheerfully*) "Pat on the back." 'Ere, come on, Dickie. Come on, can't yer? What are yer lagging behind for like that?

THE CHILDREN *move forward, and stare at the gentlefolk.*

DICKIE *enters and sits on chair by tree.*

MRS. FLINKER. Tike yer eyes orf of them toffs, they don't want brats like yer are a wormin' out their secrets. (*Pulling VIOLET.*) T'ain't perlite.

TWINNIE (*at back of her mother*). Why should we be perlite to *them*, they ain't calling for the rent.

MRS. FLINKER. They calls fer somebody's rent, yer may be sure, so you practice yer manners wiv 'em.

ANNIE. Sy, Mar, look there, there's Brother Peter.

MRS. FLINKER. Shut yer mouf about it, can't yer? 'e don't want to ob-nob with yer 'ere.

ANNIE. Course he wants us. Brother Peter, Brother Peter.

THE CHILDREN, *regardless of her, rush up to BROTHER PETER and surround him.*

BROTHER PETER (*turning to them, genial and paternal*). Dear me, some of my flock here? (*Crosses down.*) Well, well, what brings you here? (*to MRS. FLINKER*).

MRS. FLINKER (*following the children*). Good morning, Brother Peter, sir, it's the washing, sir.

BROTHER PETER. Your work of purification——

MRS. FLINKER (*laughing*). No, it ain't come to that, sir—it's the cook's at Number Six, sir.

BROTHER PETER. A good step along.

MRS. FLINKER. It's out of the way a bit, sir, but the kids do love a bit of a show, sir. Vilet's goin' to be a cinema star.

BROTHER PETER. Are you, Violet? Mickey Mouse?
Business with VIOLET picking her nose.

MRS. FLINKER. She loves a free show of the quality, sir. You gets yer money's worth 'ere, sir, I always say.

BROTHER PETER. Well, Violet, it's never too soon to learn how to act like a lady. (*Business with VIOLET. Somewhat herding them off.*) Off you go then, enjoy yourselves, enjoy yourselves.

MRS. FLINKER *starts to walk.*

CHILDREN. Got any sweets, Brother Peter?

BROTHER PETER. No, I haven't got any to-day.

MRS. FLINKER. Come on, Dickie, can't yer?

DICKIE (*to BROTHER PETER*). Got any cigarette cards, Brother Peter?

BROTHER PETER. No, not to-day.

THE CHILDREN *are difficult to get under way.* BROTHER PETER *assists energetically.*

EVADNE *comes up.*

DICKIE *crosses over R.* EVADNE *comes down.*

EVADNE (*opening her bag*). Which of you can catch a sixpence? (*Throws it as far in their direction as she can.*)

THEY *scuffle off after it wildly.* MRS. FLINKER *beams.*

MRS. FLINKER. That done it, Miss. I see you know 'ow to 'andle kids. Wish yer luck with your own some d'y. (*Goes off after the children crying out ineffectively.*) Thank the lidy properly. Blast the brats. Come on now, hand it over. They tike after their father, orl the lot of 'em. No manners.

Exits R after CHILDREN, and calls at them, "Who's got it?"

CHILDREN. I haven't, Mar, I haven't. (*Ad. lib.*)

EVADNE and BROTHER PETER *laugh and join the others. They move apart to chat.* DR. VERRO HODGES *enters, walking briskly. He is well set up, trimly dressed in professional clothes, which do not hide his athletic, youthful figure. He has a bright, intelligent face, in which lines of thought have already begun to make their mark. He is just on the sunny side of thirty. He is absorbed in his thoughts; notices EVADNE, stops, takes off his hat.*

SHE *advances towards him.*

EVADNE. Hello, Dr. Hodges.

DR. HODGES. Good afternoon, Miss Carrillon; is it not a glorious day?

EVADNE. Are you off to murder somebody, you look so cheerful?

DR. HODGES (*L laughing*). No; off to save someone. That's my stunt.

LADY CARFON R and MRS. CARRILLON R C *draw near.*

LADY CARRILLON (*L C*). What an exceptional doctor you must be, but I suppose you do not save them completely. They still need a life-line tied to your apron strings.

THEY ALL *laugh.*

BROTHER PETER. Really, very good.

EVADNE (R of DOCTOR). I should have thought if you were on such a virtuous mission that you would be chasing across in a motor car.

DR. HODGES (L). No. I always walk between Harley Street and the hospital, wet or fine. That way I give myself one patient the less.

BROTHER PETER (R). Who is that ?

DR. HODGES (*turning briskly*). Myself, of course.

BROTHER PETER *rubs hands and chuckles*.

BROTHER PETER. Very good.

DR. HODGES. It is mighty easy for a doctor who gives himself to his work to kill himself. I am far too fond of life for that, so I hurl myself into the Park, and then, if I want to get out, I have to walk out which gives me a breathing space.

LADY CARFON. Well, we must not hinder you, Doctor Hodges.

DR. HODGES. Oh, you couldn't do that. (*Realises what he has said.*) Oh, I really must go, and save that life.

HE *bows, crosses and exits*. BROTHER PETER *looks after him*.

He *bows slightly, takes off his hat, walks on briskly*.

EVADNE *turns and watches him out of sight*.

EVADNE. I do like his walk!

MRS. CARRILLON (*crosses to her. Rather annoyed*). My dear Evie, what does a person of that class matter ?

EVADNE. A jolly sight more than most of our class, I can tell you, mother.

MRS. CARRILLON *and* LADY CARFON*.* Hopeless! (*Exchange glances.*) Oh, hopeless!

LORD SIMPLEX *strolls on R in a nonchalant manner. He is young, not at all repulsive, very smart, very rich, and*

very much sought after, but more attracted by EVADNE than he has ever been before in his life.

Marriage being a social duty, he had decided to marry her.

His advent flutters MRS. CARRILLON and LADY CARFON.

He greets the ladies.

MRS. CARRILLON. Oh, how do you do, Lord Simplex.

LORD SIMPLEX. How do you do, Mrs. Carrillon?

MRS. CARRILLON. There's Evadne.

BROTHER PETER, *with a knowing look, collects and then strolls off with LADY CARFON and MRS. CARRILLON leaving LORD SIMPLEX and EVADNE in the L centre of the stage.*

She looks rather helpless, and there is a pause.

LORD SIMPLEX. Hello, Evadne! (*Shakes hands*). I hope you're not too tired after the party last night. Lovely day, isn't it? Won't you sit down?

HE and EVADNE *go to chairs L. EVADNE sits chair under tree. LORD SIMPLEX sits R of EVADNE.*

EVADNE. I was just saying I was bored with the Park.

LORD SIMPLEX. Right. Let's get out of it.

EVADNE. No; the streets are worse.

LORD SIMPLEX. Well, we'll run down to Brighton. But I am *dying* to show you this. (*Puts his hand in his pocket draws out a tiny packet.*) I have made my shot as you said last night.

EVADNE, *slightly stirred with curiosity, but not with deep emotion, bending forward, politely interested.*

LORD SIMPLEX. You said that if I guessed right—you would promise——

EVADNE. So I did. But I don't believe you have guessed right.

LORD SIMPLEX (*shows ring in box, done up*). Well, there is only the paper, the velvet and the satin between you and the knowledge of whether I was right.

EVADNE (*laughing*). Only those three little scraps of stuff?—between me and my fate?

LORD SIMPLEX. No pretending, mind you, if I have guessed right!

EVADNE. No, I will be honest. If you are right, I will say Yes.

LORD SIMPLEX. You will?

SHE *nods*.

LORD SIMPLEX. Swear?

HE *unties the packet and hands her the box. She opens it with curiosity; just as the box is opening, half hesitates, shuts her eyes, shakes herself.*

EVADNE. It is as bad as a plunge into a cold sea.
She hesitates opening it.

LORD SIMPLEX, *smiling intently, watches her.*

LORD SIMPLEX. Go on! Open it.

EVADNE. What, now?

LORD SIMPLEX. Yes, put me out of my misery.

EVADNE (*starts back with surprise, calling*). Sapphires.

LORD SIMPLEX. Well?

EVADNE. You were right, oh!

LORD SIMPLEX (*places his hand on her knee*). My darling.

EVADNE *looks at him not ill-content yet not stirred in any way, but concealing a little more feeling than the words would carry.*

EVADNE. Yes, your darling, I suppose, from now on.

LORD SIMPLEX. Put it on.

EVADNE. That is your job.

HE *leans forward and slips the ring on, slips the box on to her lap, screws up the paper and throws it under the seat.*

EVADNE (*turning the ring on her finger*). How did you guess?

LORD SIMPLEX. Isn't love supposed to understand?

EVADNE (*rather quizzically*). Love, of that superior quality! Oh, that is a pre-war article, surely? How did you really guess?

LORD SIMPLEX. Well, then, say the instinctive rectitude of my taste. They do seem to suit you.

EVADNE (*holds up her hand, laughing*). They do, don't they?

LORD SIMPLEX. And I hope I shall, too.

EVADNE. I hope so, *Lord Simplex*.

LORD SIMPLEX. Reginald.

EVADNE. All right—Reginald.

LORD SIMPLEX *rises and goes R C.*

She smiles and rises and drops her handkerchief as LADY CARFON *and* MRS. CARRILLON *come towards them.*

She holds up her hand rather casually.

EVADNE. Look, mother!

MRS. CARRILLON (*full of thankfulness*). My darling child! I am so pleased, so happy. Oh, I don't know what to say. (*Crosses to EVADNE.*)

LORD SIMPLEX. Oh, that's all right.

LADY CARFON. Warmest congratulations, Evadne. (*Turning to LORD SIMPLEX.*) No need to pretend that we have not been saving them up. And for you, too, Lord Simplex.

LORD SIMPLEX. Oh, that's all right, Lady Carfon.

MRS. CARRILLON. Oh, Brother Peter, it's all settled.

MRS. CARRILLON *sits on chair L.*

BROTHER PETER *crosses to L round back of tree.*

BROTHER PETER (*comes up rather fussily and paternally*). Well, my children, it warms our old hearts. (*Shakes hands with both emphatically.*)

LADY CARFON *crosses at back.*

EVADNE (*rather mischievously to BROTHER PETER*). Have you a heart, Brother Peter ?

BROTHER PETER (*L drawing her slightly apart from the others, in a deeper tone*). Devoted entirely to humanity. You have your share, my dear sister ; my sister, now.

EVADNE (*looks a little bit worried*). But I am a Protestant, you know.

BROTHER PETER. But Lord Simplex is a son of our Church. You will be my sister when you marry him, so why not to-day ? You have my blessing.

He turns towards the others, looks at watch, continuing :

Congratulations!

LORD SIMPLEX. Oh, that's all right! (*Rises.*)

BROTHER PETER. Now I must run. How late I am getting. My poor people in the slums, as you call them, will be waiting for me.

He makes hasty adieux and goes off, crosses R and exits
R I E.

LORD SIMPLEX *meanwhile has been drawn apart by LADY CARFON as EVADNE returns to her mother. THEY sit under tree and examine the ring Her mother takes the case.*

LADY CARFON (L). We heard that all depended on you guessing the right stone for the engagement ring. Now, do tell me, Lord Simplex, was that true ?

LORD SIMPLEX (*R of LADY CARFON*). Quite.

LADY CARFON (*full of eager curiosity*). Oh, how dared you take the risk?

LORD SIMPLEX. Risk?

LADY CARFON (*R*). Yes. A frightful risk. If you had guessed wrong she would have refused you.

LORD SIMPLEX. It was up to me to see that I didn't guess wrong.

LADY CARFON (*smiling*). Quite so, but how, how? That is what we all want to know.

LORD SIMPLEX (*R C*). Simplicity itself, but it was rather rough though having to get up so early after such a late night.

LADY CARFON. Get up so early, why?

LORD SIMPLEX. To bribe her maid before she was up, of course.

LADY CARFON (*tapping his lapel, laughs*). Oh, you cunning thing. Fair means or foul.

LORD SIMPLEX. In love or war, surely.

LADY CARFON. Oh, you clever thing!

LORD SIMPLEX (*easily*). Oh, I don't know!

LADY CARFON. But what will you do when she finds out?

LORD SIMPLEX (*suddenly disturbed*). Good heavens! She must not find out. I say, you must swear to secrecy. Oh, dear, I shouldn't have told you.

LADY CARFON (*laughs rather teasingly*). You lost your head.

LORD SIMPLEX (*eagerly pressing her*). Now, I say, look here, Lady Carfon, command me for whatever you like, but swear by whatever oath women hold sacred that you won't tell a soul.

LADY CARFON. Oh, I'll swear for a box of chocolates.

LORD SIMPLEX. The biggest there is.

LADY CARFON *wanders up stage and drops down L of*
MRS. CARRILLON.

THEY *turn laughing towards* EVADNE *and her mother, who have meanwhile been deep in conversation, obviously rather boring to* EVADNE *and very pleasing to her mother.*

EVADNE (*over C*). For the third time, I say the Park bores me.

LORD SIMPLEX. Then let's away—Brighton. I will get the car in a jiffy.

EVADNE. No. I've got an engagement to-day.

LADY CARFON. What! Another?

LORD SIMPLEX (*L C*). Engagement? What!

EVADNE. To go and see my old nurse.

MRS. CARRILLON (*R C obviously vexed*). Oh, what nonsense, Evadne. To-day of all days? How absurd. Go with Reginald. Yes, go with him.

EVADNE. No! Let him come with me and see nurse. Why shouldn't nurse be the first to hear?

LORD SIMPLEX (*looks rather crestfallen but rises heroically*). All right. Anywhere you like. We can go for tea to Richmond afterwards.

EVADNE (*turning to him, rather more seriously*). Real slumming, mind Her neighbours are just awful.

LORD SIMPLEX. Oh, I say, slumming—that's a bit thick—for you, I mean.

LADY CARFON (*with a peal of laughter*). You were always an exceptional girl, Evadne. Think of taking your fiancé slumming within half an hour—

EVADNE (*sturdily*). Why not?

MRS. CARRILLON (*rather hopeless and distressed*). Oh, in reason, in reason. It is very charming, but really to-day, my darling, she won't expect you.

EVADNE. Yes, she does. I have never broken my promise to her when I am in town, and I *am going* to-day.

LORD SIMPLEX. Well, the old nurse and nobody else ; no promiscuous slumming, mind ; too great a risk.

EVADNE. A risk ?

LORD SIMPLEX. Yes. Germs! Small-pox! Measles! Microbes!

LADY CARFON (*on his L.*) Mad ideas.

LORD SIMPLEX. Yes, you've said it, mad ideas.

EVADNE. Don't you want me to have ideas ?

LORD SIMPLEX. You have plenty ; you are perfect as you are.

EVADNE (*laughing*). Thank you, Reginald. Seriously, though, don't you like the ideas you get in the slums ?

LORD SIMPLEX (*shuddering*). I don't. I have no use for them at all.

EVADNE (C). Well, I often think the ideas you get down there are a great deal more real than some of the ideas you get in the Park.

LADY CARFON. Really!

LORD SIMPLEX. Really, Evadne! (*Turns to LADY CARFON.*)

MRS. CARRILLON (L). My darling, we are yielding to you to-day, but do not upset us all.

EVADNE. Why should it upset you if now and then I peep in at what people are suffering every day.

LORD SIMPLEX. It's not good for you.

LADY CARFON. My dear. You are a social butterfly.

EVADNE (*stamping her foot*). I don't want to be a butterfly. I'd rather be a worm.

LORD SIMPLEX (*half laughing, but really rather annoyed*). I won't have my future wife described as a worm even by herself. (*He turns rather swiftly*). Good-bye, Mrs. Carrillon.

MRS. FLINKER enters singing.

LORD SIMPLEX. See you this evening. Good-bye, Lady Carfon. (*Shaking hands, back to R entrance.*)

MRS. CARRILLON and LADY CARFON go up.

EVADNE stands centre with LORD SIMPLEX.

MRS. FLINKER with her children trailing behind her, looking back the other way as she pushes the pram, bangs the front wheel into the back of the leg of LORD SIMPLEX. The pram is now loaded with a huge bundle of washing tied up and balanced over a washing basket in one corner of which sticks out a bottle, dark in colour and very conspicuous. She pulls back on the heavy pram as though it were inclined to run away with her.

MRS. FLINKER. Come on, Twinnie, can't yer?

LORD SIMPLEX. Ah—Tch—what's that? (*Turns suddenly and lifts one leg. Moves to one side and brushes his trousers with a handkerchief.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Beg pardon, sir—sorry, I'm sure. (*Pulls up pram C stage, shakes DICKIE. HE stumbles over LORD SIMPLEX'S foot and falls. The CHILDREN scatter and stare.*)

LORD SIMPLEX (*irritated*). Vehicles like that oughtn't to be allowed in the Park.

MRS. FLINKER. Why don't yer come along and then I could see where I'm looking.

MRS. FLINKER starts pram again. DICKIE has gone C and dropped some cards. He is picking them up when she

bumps him with the pram. He falls and bawls as he has cut his hand on a stone, and smears blood and mud from his hand to his face.

EVADNE (*coming up behind him and lifting him half up*). Oh, have you hurt yourself?

DICKIE. Yus, lidy. (*Bawls.*)

MRS. FLINKER *comes up, leaving pram with other children.*

On DICKIE'S R.

MRS. FLINKER. What's the matter?

DICKIE. I've cut me hand, Mar.

EVADNE. There—there—(*Looks for her handkerchief, and comforting him*)—where's my handkerchief? Reginald, give me yours.

MRS. FLINKER *talks on at DICKIE and keeps trying to pull him on his feet.*

LORD SIMPLEX. Really—too disgusting. (*Gives EVADNE his handkerchief with reluctance.*)

EVADNE *wipes DICKIE'S face and hands with it.*

MRS. FLINKER. There, you're too kind be 'arf, Miss, I'm sure. Thank the lidy properly. (*Pulling him on to his feet. He keeps bobbing up and down, picking up his cards.*)

DICKIE. I've dropped me cards, Mar.

EVADNE. Where do you live?

MRS. FLINKER. No. 16, Grimes Court.

EVADNE. Oh, I know Grimes Court.

DICKIE. Here, yer standing on one, Mar. (*Gets it from under her foot. Goes to chair L.*)

EVADNE. My old nurse lives there—Mrs. Ross.

MRS. FLINKER. Mrs. Ross. Oh, 'er. The woman 'as 'as only two kids. She can afford to keep 'erself to 'erself, *she can.*

EVADNE. Stop crying, now, little boy, and I'll bring you some sweets when I come to see Mrs. Ross.

DICKIE. Yer ain't got a cigarette card, have yer, Miss ?

EVADNE. No.

DICKIE (*to LORD SIMPLEX*). Have yer got a cigarette card ?

LORD SIMPLEX. No, I haven't. (*Very annoyed.*) Go away.

DICKIE *goes up behind chair.*

LORD SIMPLEX. Come, dear, I insist.

Takes EVADNE'S arm. She gives him back his handkerchief. He tosses it down in disgust through opening.

EVADNE (*looking back*). Good-bye. I won't forget the sweets.

LORD SIMPLEX (*does not turn his head, but marches straight off*). Supposing Lady Carfon had seen you just now.

EVADNE. Supposing.

(*Exit together down L.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Gawd! What a toff! He reminds me of the unsanitary inspector.

DICKIE, *during this, has picked up EVADNE'S handkerchief from under the seat and looks round furtively to see that he is not observed. He crunches it in his hand without anyone seeing. He continues to play with it unobserved for a bit, sitting on chair L.*

MRS. FLINKER. Here, come on, get out of the way. Suddenly sees DICKIE playing with handkerchief.

Come on. 'Ere, Dickie, wotcher got there ?

DICKIE *puts the handkerchief behind him.*

DICKIE. Nothink. (*Tries to put it in his pocket, it falls through as the lining is quite out.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Give it 'ere.

DICKIE. I got nothink, Mar.

Pushes him aside and gets it. He rises.

And wot is this for? Not for yer nose, Dickie Flinker, my son!

DICKIE. The lidy dropped it—— *(snatches it from her).*

MRS. FLINKER. Ho! Well, you shan't 'ave it. *(Snatches it back. Smacks his head. He cries and goes us to chair at back crying and sits.)* That'll larn yer to pick up things as don't belong to yer.

Goes to above pram. Takes handkerchief and dabs her own nose with it, sniffing the scent appreciatively.

Ain't it lovely! 'Ere, you may have a sniff, Violet.

VIOLET *(smells handkerchief)*. Oh, Mar.

CHILDREN *clamour together for a sniff—she gives it to them, flicking it in their faces.*

MRS. FLINKER. Real lice on it. I'll try and get a tanner out of 'er termorrer and I'll squeeze the loverley smell out ov it to-d'y mesself. *(Stuffs it in her voluminous bosom.)* 'Ere, get a move on.

THE TWO GIRLS *are fighting over pram.*

Nar then, a nice lot of 'elp *you* are! A tugging of me back—'ere, let go—and wear your clothes properly—don't yer *feel* yer 'at's on back side fust? I'm sure Mrs. Jones noticed it—thought she looked queer at us, some 'ow . . . An' it was Violet's 'at she noticed all the time. . . Here, Violet, ain't yer got no pride? When I *do* gives yer a fevver, yer might live up to it. *(Pushes VIOLET aside.)* It's time we was home.

MRS. FLINKER *darts round and gives the pram a kick with one heel.*

THE CHILDREN *hang on to her skirts and straggle along.*

She pulls back at the pram.

Come on, Dickie.

HE goes off at last.

At DICKIE'S exit, MRS. FLINKER starts singing :

" 'Ome sweet, sweet 'ome sweet 'ome, there's no—plice like 'ome." (*Continues with variants.*)

CURTAIN down for a fraction of a minute, during which a homing flying dove is fastened on one of the central trees. Spot light, dark blue and green, just lights up the bird with a faint halo round it. Curtain goes up to the park scene in darkness, mellowed by the moonlight effect in which the bird is just visible. A voice from near the region of the bird intones in an impersonal, resonant manner ; the voice being the Spirit of the Future.

SPIRIT : " Here in the greatest city of this world
I watch mankind, searching for one to whom
The spirit of the future may reveal
The loveliness to which mankind may climb
By love. Daily I watch.
The rulers of this empire pass and pass
Deaf to my whispers of the larger fate
For their Imperial race would they but mate
Knowledge with love.
I find in none of them the heart I seek
They'll watch their fellows breed in dirt and pain
And turn again, content to their own comfort and delight
Dancing by night while others lust and get
Disease, distortion and disaster for their race.
Where is the face I seek whose eyes will see
As I see now disease spots on this soil ?
Where is the mouth to take my words from me
And clarion them to all posterity ?
Where is the heart to beat to fever pitch
In combat for me with the breeding hordes

That foul the human race by lust so base
That love is powerless ?
And yet the hour has struck, however weak
My instrument, the Fates begin, to spin
Another epoch for the human race
When all the children born are born of love
When all were loved *before* they were conceived
When all are lovely in their human flesh
And all most beauteous in their human minds
Then shall humanity and angels meet
To rear a glorious edifice for God.
But now, to-day, I must my creature find
To set in motion the first tiny wheel
That cogs this universe.

FIEND (*snarling from wings*). Whatever mortal you
may use for this I will assail.

SPIRIT. Then I will choose a girl
So simple that her gentleness shall win
Allies against you.

FIEND (*snarling*). Her girl's vanity
Will lead her where she'll look ridiculous.

SPIRIT. Then her sincerity shall like a magnet draw——

FIEND (*quickly and exultingly*). My chance to spread
dissension in the ranks of those who follow her. Ha!
ha! Jibes sting.

SPIRIT. The Art of Healing will her comrade be——

FIEND (*snarling*). Till this Trade Union feels the secret
pull I can exert through channels underground.

SPIRIT. Reason's sweet charity will arm her then.

FIEND. My prejudice has got ten thousand tongues
To smother every single argument.

Yep, yap, yep, yap (*tossed to and fro by snarling and shrill voices from right to left wing*).

SPIRIT. Then she alone with Truth must face the mob,
And like a lily springing from the mud
Must penetrate by sweetness.

FIEND. Then I'll defame, befoul, and so pollute
That men will fear to breathe the air she
breathes,
Hark to my agents, echoing everywhere!

(They sound from right wing to left wing, up stage and below stage.)

Ha, ha, hien yah! Ha, ha, yah ah!
Ha, ha, hien yah!

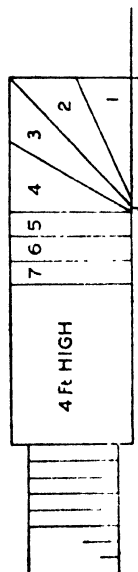
(Repeated with a growing intensity, a mixture of snarls and sneers and shrill scorn, accompanied by rasping music like wasps out to sting, all culminating in a shout and an orchestral clap almost of thunder to a sudden and complete silence. In this silence, clear and confident in clarion tones the Spirit acclaims.)

SPIRIT. Yet will I win for light comes with the dawn!

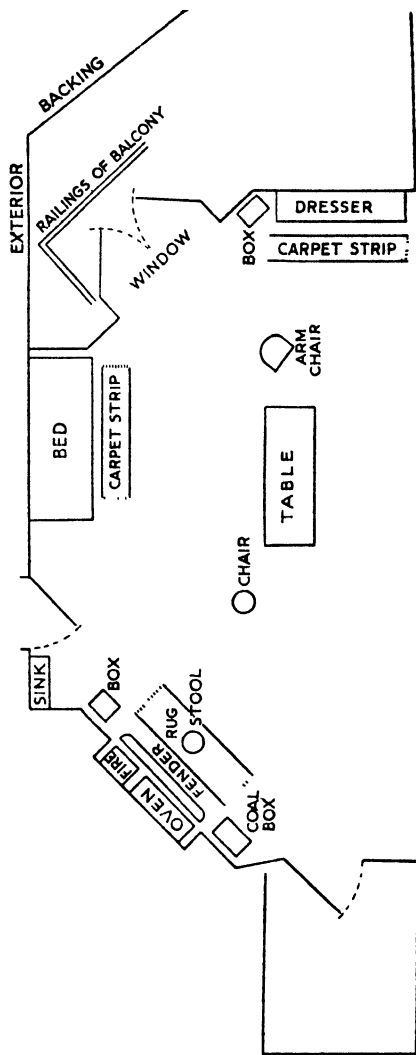
(Slow curtain.)

ACT II

KITCHEN



ACTS 1&2. Scene 3.



ACT II

SCENE I

MRS. FLINKER'S room. *Terribly dirty and ill-kept. There is a draggled bedstead, of which the castor is off so that one leg is propped up with a piece of wood. The dirty coverlet is on the bed sideways so that one corner draggles on the floor. On right side is a small balcony, with iron railings outside, opened on to by a narrow glass door ; the balcony contains a dirty box of ashes and tin cans which MRS. FLINKER has been too lazy to take down to the dust-bin, an old broom with sodden hair, a chair with a broken back, on which an old paint tin and one or two make-believe toys of the children are piled up together. The kitchen stove, on left wall, instead of being clean and bright, is dull and rusty. A few egg-shells, ashes and cabbage-stalks, lie in front of the broken ash-tray of the stove. On right is a small dresser with some chipped crockery. The door to a sort of cupboard scullery with a sink, is half off its hinges and hangs loose, and there are two or three clothes-lines across the ceiling, on which tattered and dirty garments of various sorts, badly washed, are hanging to dry. Bits of the wallpaper are torn off, and crude chalk drawings of the children show up here and there.*

Curtain rises on THREE CHILDREN in the room.

MRS. FLINKER *heard off.* SHE *opens door, calls "Get out of my way, yer brats," and enters, with the three others, puts washing basket down on T C., takes up gin bottle, drinks, then takes it over to dresser, turns, sees DICKIE still at the door.*

MRS. FLINKER (*to ANNIE, who is washing up at sink*).
Hain't yer finished that washing up yet?

ANNIE. No, Mar, not yet.

MRS. FLINKER (*looks round to door. SHE bustles outside and chivvies them in.*) Dickie! Dickie! Where are yer? (*Drags him in.*) Take yer dirty face off that wall, can't yer? What will Mrs. Ross say with yer dirty fingers all over her door. Come on, get in. (*Slams it shut with them all inside.*)

THE CHILDREN *distribute themselves.*

Now you 'elp a bit, orl of yer.

TWINNIE *gets doll from under table C and then goes over to fire with it.*

VIOLET *sits in front of fire, TOMMY on chair by fire down s.* DICKIE *R of table playing with cards. ANNIE and TEDDY by sink.*

MRS. FLINKER (*leans forward as though in real pain, groans*). 'Ere, Teddy, you are the most sensible of the lot, take that washing over to the bed and 'elp Annie. I've got to make your pa's tea ready.

TWO CHILDREN *take basket off table to bed.*

Sings "Our's is a nice 'ouse, our's is," and gets pie-dish containing meat off mantelpiece and places it on table.

DICKIE *picks up his cards and goes L.*

SHE *struggles to her feet, comes towards the table, slams down a broken pie-dish on the table, goes across to the stove and then takes a rather dirty rag off the pastry board and starts to roll some pastry on it, finding in the pastry which she had left covered, some beads.*

Vilet, get the tea-pot.

VIOLET *gets broken white teapot from shelf on dresser and lifts top part from bottom.*

MRS. FLINKER. Not that one—that's a hornament.

At cue "hornament" VIOLET lifts top part from bottom ; after which she replaces it.

MRS. FLINKER. Dick, go and get your father's cup.

DICKIE *exits R.*

You'll find it on his pillow.

Goes to pastry and rolls it. Sings. Throws bits of pastry on floor. One hits TEDDY. He cries.

'Ell, what's that ? You kids been fiddling round with the pastry.

She picks the beads out with pieces of pastry sticking to them. Throws them down on the floor.

'Ere, you dirty kids.

A piece hits one child under the table who squeals and runs over to fire and sits.

CHILD. Oh, Mar, that went in my eye.

TWINNIE *bangs her on the head and says* " Shut up, can't yer ? "

MRS. FLINKER. Serves yer right. Putting beads in yer father's pastry. Supposing he had swallowed one ; there would have been a nice to-do. 'Oo done it ? You, Annie ?

CHORUS OF CHILDREN. I didn't do it. I didn't do it. Nor me, neither.

MRS. FLINKER. Nor me, neither ! One on yer done it. *(Takes bead from pastry, sucks it, looks at it.)* Them beads is Annie's.

ANNIE *(shrilly turning from the bed)*. I didn't do it, Mar. I didn't really. It was Dick what did it.

Enter DICKIE door R with cup.

MRS. FLINKER. Well, Dick ought to be ashamed of hisself. Come 'ere, come 'ere.

DICKIE *hesitates* R.C. *He advances slowly. She puts pastry on pie and grabs him, takes cup from him and cuffs him.*

You know quite well you are going to have this for dinner termorrer. Supposin' yer had swallowed it termorrer yerself and died.

HE *cries and goes up to sink. She shakes her pastry-dirty finger at him.*

You remember that, Dick. If you do a bad thing like that and die, you'll go to 'ell, you will. That's what you deserve. That's what happens to bad boys.

TEDDY *crosses to DICKIE and tells him to shut up. There is an awful row going on.*

MRS. FLINKER *goes over to the dresser to get something and then screams and falls by chair L of table.*

DICKIE *looks at her stolidly and quite dazed does nothing but howls.*

MRS. FLINKER *(sinks down by the chair R groaning).*

Oh, God! Oh them pains. Oh, 'ell!

CHILDREN *silent instantly, when MRS. FLINKER stops speaking. Terrified.*

ANNIE *(really anxious—the other children are suddenly quiet). Wot's up, Mar? (Watching her from bed.)*

MRS. FLINKER *moans and groans and then slips off the chair, groaning on to the floor, half resting her head on the side of the chair.*

CHILDREN *look frightened. SHE begins to cry and moan.*

ANNIE *shakes her, but gets no answer. The others are still and frightened. ANNIE runs across room, opens the door and runs across, banging the door of No. 15.*

Mrs. Ross! Mrs. Ross—do come and help Mar. I don't know what is the matter. She is crying on the floor.

HETTIE ROSS (*off*). Drunk, I suppose.

ANNIE. She ain't drunk ; she's ill.

MRS. ROSS (*rather severely*). Are you sure you are speaking the truth ? Has she not been drinking ?

ANNIE. She ain't had a drop. Strike me pink, she ain't.

EVADNE (*off stage*). Shall I come ?

MRS. ROSS. On no account, Miss, please.

ANNIE *comes back, followed by HETTIE.*

HETTIE *enters as the children are getting more and more upset. MRS. FLINKER's cries have stopped and is feeling a little better. She struggles to her feet with HETTIE's help.*

MRS. ROSS. What is wrong ? What can I do for you ? Get a glass of water, Annie.

HETTIE *gets her on to chair C. ANNIE brings cup of water.*

MRS. FLINKER. Well, I am sure it is kind of you to come over, but I'm better now. It's me pains.

SHE *drinks and ANNIE goes back to fire.*

MRS. ROSS. You ought to lie down.

MRS. FLINKER. Lie down ! Me ? With six kids ! Ah, fat lot you know about the likes of me. You in your nice, quiet 'ome can lie down.

MRS. ROSS. Come, but I am sure, if you are ill. Why, Tommy is quite big, and Annie can help and do anything that is necessary. Go to bed, do.

MRS. FLINKER. Not much ; thank you kindly though. I must get on with my pastry ; it's for Mr. Flinker. (*Tries to stand up, sits by table behind R, puts pastry on pie. Groans " Oh, God," and sinks into chair C of table.*)

MRS. ROSS *offers help.*

Oh, if you could just pop that pie into the oven I should be so much obliged.

MRS. ROSS. Of course.

SHE takes the pie, opens the oven door, and feeling the heat with her hand, nods as though the fire's all right, puts the pie in and closes the door. She rakes the fire a little together.

Where's the coal ?

CHILDREN *show her.* "Annie's sitting on it." ANNIE *gets up.* MRS. FLINKER, *even in the midst of her pain, watches her.*

MRS. FLINKER. Take care of that ; not too much. That coal has got to last me a week.

MRS. ROSS. I will be careful. *(She puts only a small lump on, and draws the ashes together.)*

MRS. FLINKER *(still in pain).* Thank yer, kindly.

THE YOUNGER CHILDREN *start crying and making a row.*

MRS. ROSS. I am sure these kids must make you feel worse. Shall I take them across to my room ?

MRS. FLINKER. Oh, thank you. They're too dirty.' I couldn't have them going out. They'll mess up your 'ouse, and I know yer keeps it nice.

MRS. ROSS. Oh, don't think of that if you are ill. Come with me. Now, children, come with me.

CHILDREN. Don't want to.

DICKIE *(to MRS. ROSS).* Shut up.

SHE tries to take the two younger children with her, but they refuse to go, retreating and howling all the louder.

MRS. FLINKER *struggles to her feet, evidently feeling worse, in a dazed manner, crosses the room, flops on to the bed.*

HETTIE *looks anxious, wondering what to do.*

SHE helps MRS. FLINKER to cover her on bed.

Enter EVADNE, looks round at hovel.

MRS. ROSS. I believe Dr. Hodges is upstairs ; I am almost sure. I will run up and see. I am sure you ought to see a doctor.

MRS. FLINKER. 'Odges ain't my doctor.

MRS. ROSS. Never mind. If you are bad any doctor is your doctor. (*Goes to door C. She sees EVADNE standing at door.*) Oh, Miss Evadne, I am just going upstairs to see if I can find Dr. Hodges. The poor woman here is took real bad.

EVADNE. Can't I help ?

CHILDREN. That's the lidy we saw in the Park.

MRS. ROSS. Oh, I must not trouble you, Miss. She will be all right if I can get a doctor.

HETTIE *turns and is going upstairs, but meets on his way down*, DR. VERRO HODGES.

Oh, sir, I am so glad you are there. I was just coming up, knowing that you were with Mrs. Rootle upstairs. I was just coming to see if you wouldn't come to a poor woman here. She is took very bad.

DR. HODGES. Oh, has not she her own doctor ?

MRS. ROSS. Yes, of course, sir, but she is took sudden very bad.

EVADNE (*R of C door*). Hello, Dr. Hodges.

DR. HODGES (*C*). Is that you Miss Carrillon. What are you doing in here ?

EVADNE. I came to see my old nurse—and other things. What are you doing, may I ask ?

DR. HODGES (*with a half sigh*). Well, I have just added to the birth-rate upstairs, or rather I have been helping poor Mrs. Rootle to.

MRS. ROSS (*L C turning*). Is she all right ?

DR. HODGES. Yes, she is all right—(*a pause*)—but the child is—born dead.

EVADNE (*suddenly*). Born dead—oh, how dreadful!

DR. HODGES (*with rather a bitter look on his face*). Yes, and it is not the first time. That poor woman—it's the third time running she's had a child born dead.

EVADNE. But why? Why do you let her do it?

DR. HODGES (*turning suddenly*). I let her do it? What has it got to do with me?

EVADNE (*in a temper*). Well, surely after *twice* you might know that there was something wrong, and put it right. Is not that your job?

DR. HODGES. My dear young lady, my job is to do what I am called in to do. I am fetched for a confinement. HETTIE *closes door*.

DR. HODGES. I am not consulted beforehand.

MRS. ROSS (*crosses to L of them, looking rather shocked*). Oh, Miss Evadne, these things, you know, are not the doctor's business.

EVADNE (*impetuously determined to worry them*). Well, I don't know. If I were a doctor and I had a poor woman patient who had had two dead babies, I would jolly well want to know why before there was a third.

DR. HODGES. Yes, before. That is the time to talk about it, not *after* it is dead.

MRS. ROSS (*as though excusing her to DR. HODGES, shaking her head*). Oh, you don't understand these things, Miss. No young lady should.

SHE *again endeavours to lead DR. HODGES to MRS. FLINKER*. MRS. FLINKER'S *cries are repeated*.

DR. HODGES. Well, this is not the time for discussions. *Comes down, puts hat and bag on chair L of table*.

MRS. ROSS. Yes, 'ere she is, sir.

EVADNE *tries to comfort the children who start again to scream*.

THEY all set up a howl. The unpleasant, stuffy effect of the room takes DR. HODGES' breath back for a moment ; he hesitates, then advances towards the bed. Goes to window L, undoes clothes line, opens window.

DR. HODGES. This place wants clearing, surely, first of all. How many children have you got, Mrs. —

MRS. ROSS. This is Dr. Hodges.

MRS. FLINKER (*from the bed on which she is sitting crumpled up*). Mrs. Flinker's my name.

MRS. ROSS. This is Dr. Hodges, Mrs. Flinker. He was upstairs with Mrs. Rootle, and I asked him to come and just see how you was.

MRS. FLINKER. Well, it is kind of you.

DR. HODGES. You have your own doctor, haven't you ? (*Goes to bed.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Yes, but he was not expecting to come for a long time. I was took bad sudden like.

DR. HODGES (*in a determined voice*). Well, now, we must get these children cleared out of the way. Either they must be put to bed or perhaps Mrs. Ross would take them across to her room for a little while.

As he speaks, there is a knock on the door, and BROTHER PETER comes in.

EVADNE. Come along, dears, with me.

CHILD. Don't want to——

BROTHER PETER (R). May I come in ? What is this ? What is this ? (*Noticing the turmoil.*)

THE CHILDREN all run and cling round his coat, evidently accustomed to welcome him ; various cries of " Brother Peter," " Brother Peter "—give me a sweet. Where is your pictures ? " *from the children.*

MRS. FLINKER struggles up from the bed and curtsies and makes the Sign of the Cross.

Sweets to children first, pastry business to follow.

Quiet, you children; now quiet. What is all this about ? (*Looks at sole of his boot.*) Who has been throwing pastry on the floor ? Have you never heard "Waste not, want not ?" Oh, dear, dear, I am shocked.

ANNIE. Will you have a sweet, Brother ?

BROTHER PETER. No, no thank you. Well, Mrs. Flinker, how are you ? (*He hardly turns and remains absorbed with the children.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Thank your Holiness, just as usual.

BROTHER PETER (*in a jovial voice, not noticing her*). Just as usual, is it, only a little more so.

ALL CHILDREN *on R of* BROTHER PETER.

DR. HODGES (*half turned so that BROTHER PETER can see him*). Mrs. Flinker has been taken ill suddenly.

BROTHER PETER (*pauses and going up L C to HODGES*). Oh, you, Hodges. But you are not Mrs. Flinker's regular doctor, are you ?

DR. HODGES (L). No, I am not.

(*Pause.*)

BROTHER PETER (R). Well, an act of charity is always acceptable in the Lord's sight. It is very good of you to come in.

CHILDREN. Brother Peter, tell us a story. (*Crowd round noisily.*)

MRS. ROSS (*above table to BROTHER PETER, touches his arm timidly*). I was wanting to take the children across to my place. It is so noisy for poor Mrs. Flinker.

BROTHER PETER. Yes, you are right ; that is right ; come along, children. Shoo, shoo !

THE BROTHER *collects them easily, like a little flock, driving them before him.*

DR. HODGES. Oh, thank you, Brother Peter. Keep them quiet.

MRS. ROSS. Very well, keep quiet, children. Would you like the gramophone?

CHILDREN. Oh, yes, the gramophone. Let's have "Pat on the Back."

BROTHER PETER *pushes them out of the room into the corridor.*

MRS. ROSS *crosses the corridor, slips first into her room, leaving the door open.*

MRS. ROSS. Come along, then, children.

CHILDREN *exit all but* TOMMY.

BROTHER PETER. Hush, hush, now. You must be good with Mrs. Ross—very good. (*Bundles them off door c.*) Now, Tommy, I put you in charge, and mind, if any of these children have made a single bit of trouble, I will put it down to you at confession.

TOMMY (*sheepishly*). I will do my best, Brother Peter, sir.

THEY *all exit*. EVADNE *closes door and stands by it c.*

EVADNE (*to* DR. HODGES). What a hopeless muddle. What a dreadful life.

DR. HODGES. Not exceptional. There are lots like this. London is packed with them.

EVADNE. Well, it should not be.

DR. HODGES (*to* MRS. FLINKER). Can you walk a few steps now? You'd be better in your own room.

MRS. FLINKER. I'm all right. It ain't as if it was the first time.

DR. HODGES *and* BROTHER PETER *help* MRS. FLINKER *to her feet and the* DOCTOR *and she go into the inner room.*

EVADNE *and* BROTHER PETER *are left standing C.*

EVADNE (*R turns quickly on BROTHER PETER*). Brother Peter, these people are of your faith ?

BROTHER PETER (*R C nodding*). They are ; good Earlyans. They never miss a fast day.

EVADNE (*C rather sarcastically*). And you, I suppose, help them to starve with the hope of Heaven ?

BROTHER PETER. The hope of Heaven is all that many of these poor people have, is it not ? You would not have me take that from them. Purgatory is the worst that my heart can talk to them about, poor things.

EVADNE. You are sorry for them ? But why don't you do something practical to help them ? Why does this woman have six children and only two of them decently healthy ?

BROTHER PETER. Six, my dear ? She has had eleven.

EVADNE (*startled*). Eleven ! Where are the others ?

BROTHER PETER. Safe in Heaven.

EVADNE. Safe in Heaven. Why did they not stay *here* ? Why did they ever come here at all, then just go back so quickly ? What good does it do ?

BROTHER PETER. I am beginning to think that you are not only a Protestant, but a heathen. Do you not know that if the Lord wills souls into existence they have to come into this world as babies ?

EVADNE (*quickly*). No matter how soon they leave it ?

BROTHER PETER. That is not the chief thing. If they just breathe and are baptised then they are immortal souls in the service of God.

EVADNE. I think it is dreadful that any God should want his souls made that way, in rooms like these, in homes like these ; dreadful. (*Comes down a little to door R.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES *comes out of the door*. EVADNE *turns quickly to him and crosses in front of* BROTHER PETER *to R C.*

Dr. Hodges, don't you think it is dreadful, too ?

DR. HODGES (*with a look of enquiry*). Dreadful ? Oh, not worse than usual. I think she will have quite a good time. (*Taking out cigarette case, lighting cigarette.*)

EVADNE (*looks at him rather dazed*). I am talking about the dreadfulness of sickly babies coming one after another to homes like these. (*She turns quickly, looking from one man to the other.*) Brother Peter tells me Mrs. Flinker—this poor wretched woman—has had eleven children—eleven !

Both men are silent, not knowing quite what to say.

DR. HODGES (*at last suggests*). Well, she is a healthy woman, a strong woman ; she has come to no harm.

EVADNE (*rather cynically*). But have the children come to no harm ? Five of them have died—five—five have died. And look at those younger ones with their snivelling, half-witted faces.

BROTHER PETER. The Lord of All has need of many kinds of servants.

EVADNE (*turns to him*). Brother Peter, you frighten me.

BROTHER PETER. Frighten you ?

EVADNE. Yes, you frighten me. I thought you preached about a God who was good. (*She turns quickly to* DR. HODGES.) Doctor, if priests cannot see it, surely you can. You are a servant of the Ministry of Health—*Health*, not disease, misery, death. Cannot you find out some way of stopping such cruel misery ? There must be some way.

DR. HODGES. Well, of course.

Pause. A look between BROTHER PETER *and* DR. HODGES.

Oh, our day's work is so full of misery we do not have time to think about generalities. We are busy helping individual cases.

Knock. As they speak the door opens and LORD SIMPLEX puts his head in.

LORD SIMPLEX (R C). My dear girl! Here in this filthy den, and I find that wretched Hettie of yours has packed her room with those filthy little brats. Come away at once. You will be having smallpox next. What will your mother say? Come, dear.

As she hesitates, he advances and firmly and quietly he places his hand on her arm and begins to lead her away.

LORD SIMPLEX. My dear, you must come, really.

EVADNE (*turning*). Yes, I will. Yes, I know I promised to come quickly, but the woman has been taken ill.

LORD SIMPLEX. Ill? What, here? Come away at once.

He hurries more quickly to the door, and exits C. Just at the door, EVADNE turns.

EVADNE. Dr. Hodges, don't you know? Won't you tell me? Won't you help?

He shakes his head to all three questions.

DR. HODGES. What's to be done?

EVADNE. There is altogether too much of misery in the slums. These dead babies, one after the other upstairs, and six filthy little brats in their—(*she turns quickly to the doctor*) Dr. Hodges, don't you know what is wrong?

DR. HODGES (*half laughs, roughly; shrugs his shoulder*). Human nature, that is what is wrong.

EVADNE. Surely we are civilised enough to know how to control human nature?

DR. HODGES. Of course, if she asks—science can offer several bits of advice—there are means—of controlling—
Look from BROTHER PETER.

BROTHER PETER (*quickly, and hardly showing the ruthless man under his hitherto amiable coat*). You are not Mrs. Flinker's doctor and I am her priest. I cannot have infidel doctrines brought in here.

DR. HODGES (*who was about to open his lips again, closes them*). Right. I did not deliberately trespass, you know. I was called in.

BROTHER PETER. Of course, my boy, we are very grateful. Her own doctor will be along. I will fetch him myself.

EVADNE (*from near the door and now very insistent and intense*). Dr. Hodges, I believe you do know something to help her and her kind.

DR. HODGES. If I did, my dear Miss Carrillon, I should not tell *you*.

EVADNE. You won't tell me, and you won't tell them. You keep such precious knowledge a secret, if you really have it.

DR. HODGES *about to speak, is silent*.

(*In a temper, but coldly and incisively, rather a stinging pause between her main words to rub in her scorn*). You good, religious priests, you humane and learned medicals, you paternal Government officials, all of you—are in the secret for yourselves—but what do you care for Mrs. Flinker *really*? Nothing! She's a parishioner, a patient, a subject! You will not give her the knowledge you possess so that she may be saved torturing misery. You—(*to* DR. HODGES)—serve a Ministry of *Health* that is a farce! That thinks always of disease—that keeps health secrets that the poor are crying for—and you help to keep these secrets—(*turns away from him as though she had no further use for him*).

LORD SIMPLEX (*from the door*). Are you coming, dear ?

EVADNE. Yes, I'm coming. (*Looks at BROTHER PETER with a sad, almost helpless gesture*). Well, I'll find out. I'll find out for myself.

(*Exit U C.*)

On EVADNE'S exit, the DOCTOR by fire and BROTHER PETER over L face each other. There is a pause, then the DOCTOR throws his cigarette in the fire and walks slowly to door D R, turns facing BROTHER PETER and says :

DR. HODGES. Brother Peter, perhaps she's right. The misery of it all—the useless agony—five dead out of eleven children.

BROTHER PETER. It is the will of God.

DR. HODGES. But surely medical science can help—should help. We can at least guide them.

BROTHER PETER. You must not interfere.

DR. HODGES. Interfere !

BROTHER PETER. With the law of Nature which is the will of God.

(*Pause.*)

DR. HODGES *sees it is hopeless, exits D R.*

CHILDREN'S voices heard singing to gramophone as

Slow curtain.

ACT II

SCENE II

Two days later.

The same room. It is a dull day. Everything looks very dreary in room No. 14.

MRS. FLINKER *is lying on the bed. On the dresser is a very dirty, rather broken wicker basket cradle in which lies a dead baby covered over.*

TOMMY and ANNIE FLINKER *are hushing and quieting the younger children as far as possible. ANNIE FLINKER is putting on a kettle to boil, which she partly spills over one of the children.*

ANNIE *brings kettle to fire and trips over children.*

DICKIE *stands R of table playing with his cards.*

MRS. FLINKER. Can't you kids have some sense? Ain't I told yer to keep quiet and not get in Annie's way?

ANNIE (*by fire*). They wants to see the fire, Mar. You're 'ot in bed, but it's cold out 'ere to-day.

MRS. FLINKER. Cold? It's as 'ot as 'ell——

TOMMY. Doctor said yer was feverish, Mar——

MRS. FLINKER (*restless*). Then all the more yer should keep 'em from making such a row.

TOMMY (*at sink*). Give us a wipe, Dickie.

DICKIE *goes up to sink.*

ANNIE (*crosses to bed—sits*). Mar! Mar! I'm 'ungry.

MRS. FLINKER (*looking up*). Ain't yer 'ad your bread and treacle only an hour ago?

ANNIE. Only one bite, Mar, the kids took the rest while I was making yer milk 'ot.

MRS. FLINKER. Well, if yer 'ungry, take a drink of water. That'll 'elp yer to wait till supper. Nice an' nourishin' water is really—tho' it mayn't taste much.

ANNIE *goes over to dresser, gets cup and stops while DICKIE says his lines, then to sink.*

DICKIE (*drying cup at sink—valiantly*). I larnt at school only larst week we're nearly all water really, with only a little spirit in us, and the water all gets back into the Dead Sea in the end, and it's the spirit wot goes to 'eaven.

MRS. FLINKER (*sighing*). Spirits is 'eavenly. Annie—is there a drop of gin anywheres?

ANNIE *goes to dresser.*

MRS. FLINKER. No! The vinegar bottle.

ANNIE *gets gin bottle and gives it to her mother, who puts it under bedclothes.*

EVADNE (*from the outside*). No, it is no good, Hettie, I *will* go in and see how that poor woman is.

MRS. ROSS (*at door*). Don't, Miss, please. His lordship would be vexed.

MRS. FLINKER. Hush, kids, here's Mrs. Ross.

EVADNE. His lordship does not know where I am. It cannot do me any harm; it is not infectious.

MRS. ROSS. I do not like it, Miss.

EVADNE. And I do not suppose *she* likes it. I might help them. At any rate, I am going to see her.

HETTIE, *seeing her immovable, draws aside.*

ANNIE *crosses to fire for saucepan.*

EVADNE. How are you to-day, Mrs. Flinker? I have brought you some flowers. (*Produces a bunch of flowers. Puts them on bed.*)

MRS. FLINKER. 'Ow lovely! Well, that is very kind of you, Miss. Here, Annie, put these in water and be careful of them now.

ANNIE *comes over to bed, takes flowers, OTHER CHILDREN gather round. She puts them in a milk glass and sets on mantelpiece. All the children are talking at once.*

MRS. FLINKER. Oh, be quiet, you little devils, can't yer? Ho, I am all right. I'd get up only the darned doctor won't let me, and the nurse she will be 'ere in a little while, and I daresn't do what she tells me not to. Oh, she is a 'oly terror.

EVADNE (*sitting on a chair near her by window*). But why are you out here instead of in that quiet bedroom?

MRS. FLINKER. Quiet? What kind of quiet could I 'ave, not knowin' wot these strange people are doing in my kitching? I would not 'ave a moment's quiet.

EVADNE. Oh, but surely, now, Mrs. Ross or someone will take care of things for you?

MRS. FLINKER. Don't like to ask her, Miss. Besides, there's no need. What with Tommy and Annie such big grown-ups as they are and the nurse comin' in, I do very well, but I have to keep a heye on things.

Meanwhile, ANNIE gets pot from under sink.

ANNIE. Get out of the way, can't yer?

MRS. FLINKER *propping herself up on one elbow, watches her, calls across the room.*

MRS. FLINKER. 'Ere, you Annie, what's the good of putting on a saucepan without its lid? When do you think it would boil?

ANNIE (*to DICKIE*). 'Ere, get me the lid, Dickie.

DICKIE *gets small lid and drops right in saucepan.*

ANNIE. Not that one—the bigger one.

Business for DICKIE. He tries to reach big saucepan, cannot, says "I can't reach it."

ANNIE. Tommy, reach it for him.

Business getting lid down. It drops accidentally on one of the children. Screams. Puts on the saucepan.

MRS. FLINKER *sinks back on the pillow.*

MRS. FLINKER. What are yer doin' of now?

DICKIE. Well, she got in my way.

MRS. FLINKER. Them kids wants looking after every minute.

EVADNE. Yes, but surely somebody else could look after them just to give you a rest now.

MRS. FLINKER. Rest, Miss, rest? I tell you rest ain't only in the body, it is your mind. How could I have a moment's rest shut away inside and not knowing what was going on out 'ere?

ANNIE *goes and gets rag to wipe up wet.*

EVADNE (*seeing the hopelessness of it, says*). Yes, perhaps you are right, but you ought to have some grown-up person here all the time looking after you. All the time.

SHE *turns, looks round the room, notices the cradle L, says in an awed and expectant voice*:

Oh, Mrs. Flinker, is that the baby?

MRS. FLINKER. Yes, Miss.

Pause. Business EVADNE. She advances happily as tho' going to coo to a tiny, smiling thing and lifting the cover peeps in. She sees the stark horror there and remains frozen. The change from the happy smile to this must be played with changes of intense expression which make the audience see the dreadful remains in the cradle and feel the horror she feels.

MRS. FLINKER. Poor thing, born before its time.

EVADNE (*shows horror when she turns from it, dreading it*). Oh, how dreadful to have it *here*.

MRS. FLINKER. Well, what else am I to do, Miss? I can't put it in one of them rooms unless I was there too. Them younger kids—no knowing what they would be up to.

EVADNE (*almost breaking down at window*). Why don't people think?

MRS. FLINKER. Think, Miss. What else have I got to do all day long in bed like this?

EVADNE (*full of contrition, turns to MRS. FLINKER*). Oh, I didn't mean you; I meant us. Why, my mother and Brother Peter and people like that—why don't they think?

MRS. FLINKER (*rather touched*). Oh, well, Miss, it can't be helped. It's what the Lord wishes.

EVADNE *shrinks away, a look of terror on her face*.

BROTHER PETER *enters*.

BROTHER PETER. May I come in?

CHILDREN *rush at BROTHER PETER, shouting* "Tell us a story."

BROTHER PETER. No, I've no story.

CHILDREN. Got a cigarette card?

BROTHER PETER. No, I haven't any cigarette cards. And how are you to-day—better?

MRS. FLINKER. Yes, Brother.

EVADNE (*quickly*). Brother Peter.

Silence from children.

I must speak to you; I must.

Goes to door, calls:

Hettie.

HETTIE *enters*.

EVADNE. Hettie, will you take the children and give them the cake and milk I brought for them?

MRS. ROSS. Come along, my dears. I have some of the lovely cake with currants in, which the kind lady has brought you.

CHILDREN. Oh, cake with currants.

BROTHER PETER *shooes them off and closes door*.

Takes DICKIE who is reading on box below fire, off by ear, saying, "Cake, with currants!"

EVADNE, *at DICKIE'S exit, crosses behind chair R of T.*

BROTHER PETER *comes down C.*

EVADNE. Brother Peter, I must speak to you. This is dreadful—dreadful. Do you know that baby over there is dead?

BROTHER PETER (*R with a sigh*). Yes; poor little lamb. Died before it was baptised.

EVADNE (*R flaring up*). Before it was baptised? (*She gives a half hysterical laugh*). It does not make an immortal soul if it dies before it is baptised, does it?

BROTHER PETER (*R C looking very shocked, sighs again*). Alas!

EVADNE. Oh, so that in this case even God did not benefit?

BROTHER PETER. Unfortunately, no.

EVADNE. Do you mean to tell me this misery, the twelfth baby and this one born dead, those three dead babies upstairs—do you mean to tell me that God could not manage to people Heaven in any other way?

BROTHER PETER (*in a serious voice*). These things, my dear, are above our understanding.

EVADNE. I do not think that. We can read the Bible.

BROTHER PETER (*shakes his head, comes down slightly*). Ah, the conceit, the conceit of you Protestants. A humbler spirit would be more becoming.

EVADNE (*quickly*). Humble ! Would you have me bow the knee and acquiesce in misery for others which I could actively prevent ?

BROTHER PETER (*inexpressibly shocked, holding up his hands*). Actively, actively—what do you mean ?

EVADNE. You tell me that your God tortures poor women, tortures little babies, makes their mothers bear them for nine months and bear them dead so that He shall people His Heaven with creatures to praise Him. You tell me all that, and you also tell me that your God is good, and you are to do nothing to help these people—*my God* is a God of Love, of understanding. My God would help these people—yes—would help them even through me.

BROTHER PETER. Curb your wicked tongue. What should you, a young, conceited girl, know of mysteries that have puzzled all the ages. It is for you humbly to bow the knee.

EVADNE. No ! It is for me to help. I have read my Bible. I remember Christ said : "Woe unto you who shall place a stumbling block in the path of one of these little ones." Is not a home like this a stumbling block ? Is not the diseased, miserable, half-witted mind like that wretched little Dickie Flinker's a stumbling block, and could not these things be avoided by human intelligence *somehow* ? They could. They could. Why won't you help ?

BROTHER PETER *impassive*.

DR. VERRO HODGES *knocks at door*.

BROTHER PETER and EVADNE *fall apart*.

BROTHER PETER *crosses to fireplace, with obvious relief*.

EVADNE (*still intense with her mission*). Dr. Hodges. Come here.

DR. HODGES. Hallo!

EVADNE (U C). Come here. Have you heard—that poor woman—another—her baby dead? And it died, before they could baptise it! That is all that is worrying Brother Peter. His God has been cheated. It died too soon. It would not have mattered if it had died to-day. Dr. Hodges, isn't there some way of stopping babies coming when a woman has already had twelve and does not want another?

DR. HODGES (*looking at her frankly*). Yes, there are means.

EVADNE (*turning in triumph to BROTHER PETER*). There you are. Well?

DR. HODGES. But it is not for laymen, you know, to meddle with these things.

EVADNE. Perhaps it wouldn't be if you professional clergy and you professional doctors did your jobs, but, if you won't, is it not for anyone to do—anyone who sees and feels?

DR. HODGES (*behind table c*). No, no. Not for young girls.

EVADNE (*almost in tears*). Do you know, I think it is only the young people who can feel? I was telling mother last night, and she didn't care; she didn't care a straw.

BROTHER PETER (R). But your mother has a tender heart; a good, tender woman. She has suffered too much herself, perhaps. One cannot go through life feeling for everyone, you know.

EVADNE. Can't one? Does one's heart have to get seared and hardened like leather so that sorrows do not make any impression on it?

DR. HODGES (*quietly*). It is a mercy, it does, you know. We should all die if we felt as much as we ought to.

EVADNE (*turning quickly*). Then life's a thing for youth to deal with, youth should do life's serious jobs while it still has a heart to be touched.

DR. HODGES *nods as though sympathetic*. BROTHER PETER *looks angry*. EVADNE, *turning swiftly with a warm, personal smile to DR. HODGES*.

EVADNE. You have a heart, haven't you? (*Her hand on his arm.*)

DR. HODGES (*looking at her with an intense, personal appreciation*). I have, indeed, at least—well, someone has got my heart. I think it is still beating.

EVADNE. Oh, then you will do. You will help.

DR. HODGES (*shrugs his shoulders*). I must run upstairs. My patient is waiting. (*Goes to door.*)

EVADNE. You will help?

DR. HODGES (*on stairs*). How, more than I am doing at present, by helping individuals?

(*Exits upstairs.*)

Pause. BROTHER PETER *crosses behind table to EVADNE L.*

BROTHER PETER (*to EVADNE*). I think, Miss Carrillon, you had better go home before you do any more mischief——

EVADNE. I—do mischief—in the face of this?

BROTHER PETER (*intensely; retreating and holding out his arms as though protecting his flock from her*). You are playing with fire. You don't know what you are speaking of. You must leave the world to wiser, older folk to manage.

Enter CHILDREN who gather round BROTHER PETER. SHE looks towards BROTHER PETER, but he is remote from her, separated by a gulf. In the silence, cries are heard coming up from the street. Meanwhile the world suffers.

VIOLFT. Tell us a story.

BROTHER PETER (*draws stool from fire and sits with children round him*). A story? Very well. What shall it be?

CHILDREN. The Three Bears.

BROTHER PETER. All right. The Three Bears. Once upon a time——

EVADNE. Brother Peter.

Dead silence.

I will find out how to help alone!

BROTHER PETER. Once upon a time, there were——

VIOLET. Oh, you're tickling me.

She wriggles off BROTHER PETER'S knee.

The other children are all on the floor round him, DICKIE with two pieces of cake, one behind his back.

TEDDY *sees it, and makes a grab, saying, "Yer greedy pig."*
THEY *have a stand-up fight, until :*

BROTHER PETER. Dickie, Dickie, Dickie!

DICKIE. Well, he pinched my cake.

(Curtain.)

ACT III

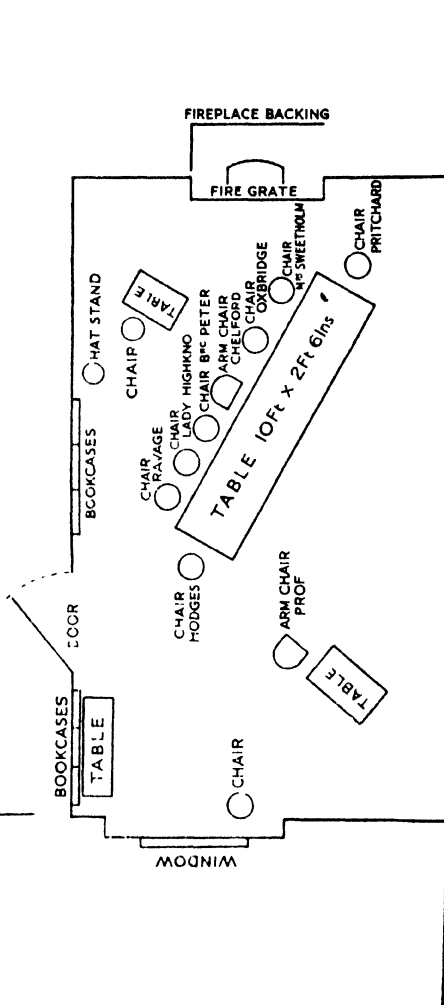
THE LIBRARY
COMMISSION SCENE

○ CHAIR

SETTEE

RUG

ACT 3.
Scenes 1&2.



ACT III

SCENE I

The Library in "Commission House," two months later, afternoon.

CURTAIN rises on a large, panelled, dignified apartment. The panelling is very plain, but good, in light oak. Left side a recessed window with leaded panes ; back, panels and book-cases alternating ; centre back, door opening into an outer hall, a glimpse of which can be seen when the door is opened, a lofty affair with a settee and umbrella stand. Right side wall, recessed bookcases. Right front, a fireplace. The main centre of the stage occupied by a long narrow table, along which are seated ten people ; the CHAIRMAN of the COMMISSION sitting centre back ; the group arranged as in accompanying diagram. The side of the table facing the audience is left blank. In front of each member of the Commission are some sheets of paper, pen and ink. Right back of the CHAIRMAN'S place is a small table at which the Secretary sits, and between the CHAIRMAN and the member on his left is a rather wider space so that the Secretary can be well seen from the front.

Half facing the table on the L is a small separate table and chair at which the witness sits. AS THE CURTAIN RISES, all but one of the members of the COMMISSION are already seated in their places, the space to the CHAIRMAN'S left being unoccupied. Left back is a circular hanging coat rack, on which are one or two coats and hats. The CURTAIN RISES on the witness speaking, evidently concluding a long and learned speech, to which THE COMMISSION has been listening, at first with attention,

which is now beginning to wander. The witness is PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK, an elderly man with long greyish beard, rather slovenly, loose clothes, hands that are always fidgeting with papers and things, glasses; a professorial manner, but although a very voluble, not a fluent or a pleasant speaker, and apt to "hum" and "haw," swallow his sentences, and then, perceiving that they are not understood, to repeat them once or even twice rather irritatingly.

Mumbles in black-out to open.

PROF. BLACK. So you see, my lord, ladies and gentlemen, if I have made myself—hum—as I hope, clear to your intelligence, to your—haw—I should say your remarkable and far-sighted intelligence, I hope that you will accept my point, which is that it is a *Law of Nature* (*lights up*) that the fittest should survive, and this Law of Nature is in our society as at present constituted flagrantly, I was going to say disgracefully—hum—but perhaps I should say flagrantly disobeyed, interfered with, upset by what I can only describe as the *mawkish* sentimentality of our—haw—officials. (*Takes glass of water.*)

THE COMMISSION, *seeing that the tirade is nearly at an end, partly wakes up, one or two nod in agreement.*

DR. VERRO HODGES, *who is sitting next on the witness's left, looks critical and alert.*

THE BISHOP, *who is taking the chair, partly smiling, half shakes his head, and is seen to murmur, though not to be quite audible, something about "higher things."*

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK glares round, hearing no sound of dissent, continues:

You have, my lord, ladies and gentlemen—you have my *précis*, you have heard what I was saying, and you will, I feel sure, agree with me in my inevitable, my logical, my irrefutable deduction, that this pernicious doctrine of birth control, which is becoming now such a menace to our

national existence, must on all accounts be stopped. It is only by encouraging, as nature does, a large excess of births, the great majority of which shall die before reaching maturity, that we can hope to weed out the unfit and thus maintain that physical perfection which our race has only acquired after hundreds of centuries of toil and evolution, aided by the so-called cruelties of nature which weeded out the majority of those born, leaving always the best.

MRS. SWEETHOLM *nods to everything.*

HE *slaps himself on the chest as though he himself were the supreme work of nature. There is a murmur, partially of agreement, around the COMMISSION.*

As the COMMISSION is seated : DR. HODGES : SIR THEODORE RAVAGE, on DR. HODGES' left, is an elderly, precise, rather dictatorial bureaucratic representative of the Government. He is dangling an eyeglass ; under his waistcoat is a narrow white slip. He is in correct afternoon dress, and from time to time has been making, with obvious pleasure, notes on what has been said.

On his left sits LADY HIGHKNO, who is very elderly, excessively haughty, with a beaked nose and big features, dictatorial in manner, rather untidily dressed in the fashion of some of the country aristocracy who are so wealthy that they can ignore their clothes.

On her left sits BROTHER PETER. On his left THE CHAIRMAN, THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE, an Anglican with fair hair turning white, a pink, pleasant face, well fed, though not too fat, comfortable, mellow, exceedingly courteous, a married man whose edges have all been rubbed off and whose function as Chairman is to pour oil on often troubled waters, which he does very successfully. The seat on his left is empty for the moment. Next to the left is MRS. SWEETHOLM, a very fat, elderly, motherly, upper-middle-class woman, with a bonnet with lavender strings, a sweet, grandmotherly person who

plays always for safety and social courtesy, and valiantly assists THE BISHOP in pouring oil on the troubled waters to such an extent that she inclines to agree with everybody, but when allowed to state her own views, is always old-fashioned and Victorian.

On her left is the REVEREND GODFREY PRITCHARD, representing the Nonconformist element, rather loose-limbed, ethical, not too well fed and a little inclined to burn the midnight oil and show in his face that he does so, with a rather inflated voice and manner, a dress which is a mixture between that of an ordinary layman and an Anglican priest.

At the SECRETARY'S table at the left back of the BISHOP is seated MR. NATHANIEL FACER. He wears sober attire, has a very ingratiating manner, yet a controlling and dominating personality, and shepherds the whole Commission through its job, keeps them up to the mark by a mixture of ingratiating politeness and flattery, bustling them when they are little expecting it, and managing things for them. He is a persistent peacemaker, and in his hands most of the Commission are as wax. His hair is greying, but he is not yet elderly; his age is about forty-three or so.

As PROFESSOR BLACK finishes his speech the BISHOP OF CHELMGATE from the chair leans forward with a half bow and his genial, charming smile and in a mellow voice reminiscent of a cathedral, says :

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. I am sure the Commission is profoundly indebted to Professor Beverley Black for his admirable, lucid and learned evidence.

(ALL bow.)

Although this Commission is investigating these serious problems of population from a social and ethical, I may say, indeed, almost more from a fundamentally moral point

of view, we are all only too ready to welcome light thrown upon this problem by *science*—

(PROFESSOR *bows*.)

which has in recent days revealed so much and so astoundingly the workings of nature which we dare not flout. I am sure, Professor, you have the warm thanks of the Commission for your most admirable evidence.

The rest of the Commission murmurs its assent and half bows towards the PROFESSOR who bows back.

PROF. BLACK. Most happy, I am sure, and if I have not made anything clear—perhaps you will allow me to—

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*breaking in*). It is, perhaps, I should explain, our usual custom after we have heard the direct evidence of a witness to examine the witness and ask certain questions in rotation. (*Turning to his left*.) I see that my friend and colleague—

FACER *leans over and whispers* "Not here."

Oh! is not yet here, so I will begin with the Commissioner on my right. I myself have nothing to ask you, Professor. You have made your statement so admirably lucid.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE *then bows to* BROTHER PETER *on the right*.

BROTHER PETER (*speaking to* PROFESSOR BLACK). You, then, sir, I understand, from the side merely of purely *biological* science, utterly and entirely condemn the practice of birth control?

PROF. BLACK. I do, sir. It is a method by which we will cheat Nature of her only means of improving the race.

BROTHER PETER (*leaning back in his chair with a satisfied smile*). That is sufficient, thank you, sir.

He *half turns in his chair*.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Lady Highkno?

LADY HIGHKNO. Of course, Professor, much of your biological data is above my head, but after your clear and explicit statement to Brother Peter, I need only ask one point, and that is this: What would you do with persons who persisted in making use of this modern pestilential knowledge?

PROF. BLACK. Madam, I would, I think I may say, if I were in power—I would shoot them.

A murmur runs round the COMMISSION.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*half laughing*). Is not that rather extreme?

PROF. BLACK (*half laughing*). Well, you see, I am not likely to be in power, so I may perhaps allow my pious wishes to have this natural outlet.

There is a smiling murmur. LADY HIGHKNO indicates that she has nothing further to say.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Sir Theodore Ravage?

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*leans forward*). Your evidence, sir, was most valuable——

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Quite.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. I beg your pardon.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. I only said quite.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. —most valuable, and I have made a number of notes so that His Majesty's Government, which I have the honour of representing on this Commission, may be made fully acquainted with your most useful views. I should just like to ask, as a matter requiring further elucidation, whether you have any data available on a subject of more direct *human* statistics. You have mentioned to us large numbers of animal species dating from some millions of years ago, up to the time when man made his first appearance on this earth, but what our Government has to deal with are human beings to-day. Now it is stated by those who advocate the application of birth con-

trol to our population that after the sixth child (*looks at LADY HIGHKNO, who freezes him, then he looks at BROTHER PETER who nods his head*) I believe there is a tendency for the death rate to increase, and for the quality of the child to become inferior. Have you in your biological studies any evidence bearing on this subject in the human race?

PROF. BLACK (*rises*). No, sir. Unfortunately these purely trivial human affairs are out of my province.

(LADY HIGHKNO giggles.)

LADY HIGHKNO. Oh, so clever.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Pray be seated.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE *bows and sits*.

Dr. Verro Hodges.

DR. VERR0 HODGES. May I ask, then, has it not occurred to you that possibly under modern conditions human affairs may require a different form of treatment from what nature meted out to our ancestors for so many thousands of years in the wilds?

PROF. BLACK. Sir, human nature never changes.

DR. HODGES. But have you not just been telling us of the multitudinous changes of human nature all through evolution?

PROF. BLACK (*not in the least disturbed*). I was telling you of the *bodily* changes taking place solely through the survival of the fittest, but once we become human our fundamental human nature remained the same.

DR. VERR0 HODGES *evidently demurs, but does not pursue the subject. Door back L opens and THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE enters in a shuffling hurry. He is a great contrast to THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE, tall, thin, dark, ascetic, haggard and elderly, rather stooping. He hurries forward with his overcoat on and a violet silk muffler around his neck; his hat he left in the hall. He hurries*

to his seat and has a whispered confabulation with the CHAIRMAN who hands him papers. He then bows to PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK, who bows back to him.

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. I'm not late, am I? (*Remains standing.*)

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. No, no.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Of course not.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Perhaps, my lord, as you did not hear the evidence of Professor Black, you have no questions to ask?

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*standing and speaking as though he is too eager to sit down*). Oh, but I read his evidence, I read his evidence, and I just wanted to hear confirmed what seemed to me so valuable a point. You think, Professor—this is Professor Black?

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Oh, yes. Undoubtedly!

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. —that these pernicious interferences with nature which are now being advocated so widely by those who unfortunately have the ear of the public, are against the fundamental laws of our nature and are likely to lead to harmful results which we cannot even anticipate?

PROF. BLACK (*flattered*). That is so, absolutely, my lord.

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Thank you, thank you.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Mrs. Sweetholm?

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE *sits*. THE CHAIRMAN *indicates that MRS. SWEETHOLM'S turn has come*.

MRS. SWEETHOLM (*shakes her head*). Oh no, oh no. I am sure I have nothing to say. I quite agree with all that has been said—all—everything.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Mr. Pritchard.

REV. PRITCHARD. Professor, although naturally much interested in what you have to say, I cannot without some

demur accept all your conclusions. You said, for instance, just now, that human nature remained the same since it became human nature. (*Rises.*) Surely, sir, you would not deny the power of God to change the human heart and to change the needs and requirements of society with those changes. Have not the motor car and other modern things *affected* human nature?

PROF. BLACK. Sir, I say no, absolutely and emphatically no.

REV. PRITCHARD. If that is your answer, sir, we as a Commission must accept it. It is not our place to dispute with you. (*Sits.*)

BROTHER PETER *leaning forward in chair, gazing up, hums a bar and stops suddenly as they look at him.* THE SECRETARY, *who has been taking shorthand notes all through, half rises, crosses to R top of table and says:*

MR. FACER. If Professor Beverley Black has no further statement, another witness is waiting.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Oh, yes, yes.

THE SECRETARY *whispers something to* THE CHAIRMAN.

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK *shuffles his papers together, rises and bows.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE *bows towards him and says:*

We must thank you, Professor Black, very much for your valuable addition to our considerations.

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK *bows himself out in an obsequious manner. By this time the* BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE *is shuffling about with his coat and leans across to* MRS. SWEETHOLM, *saying:*

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. This room is very hot, very hot.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Yes, terribly.

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Last week it was so cold that I

felt constrained to come in my coat. This week it is insufferably hot.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Don't you think—er—perhaps if you took off your coat——

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Oh, er—yes.

HE looks round, rises, takes off his coat, goes towards the hat rack, on which he hangs it, hanging the violet silk muffler over it. He returns and sits down.

THE SECRETARY, going out with PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK, returns, bringing with him, very soberly and beautifully dressed, in a pale afternoon costume, THE HEROINE.

MR. FACER. Miss Carrillon, my lord.

SHE bows, looks very timid, almost frightened.

THE CHAIRMAN turns ingratiatingly and smilingly.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Come along, Miss Carrillon ; don't be frightened of us.

HE rises and shakes her hand, keeping his hand on hers after patting it, encouraging her as though she were a child.

THE MEN rise for a moment.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. This is little Miss Carrillon who wants to give evidence before us, and you know we agreed that she should, for we felt that there was a publicly voiced reproach that our Commission was composed of perhaps rather elderly persons——

LADY HIGHKNO *furious at this.*

—as I am one myself, I may be allowed to say this—and we felt that we wanted to keep in touch with the spirit of the times.

There is an assenting murmur all round.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. Very good, indeed, of you to come, Miss Carrillon ; very charming.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Pray be seated, my dear young lady ; we won't trouble you more than we can help.

MR. FACER *leads her across to the witness's chair ; places it comfortably for her ; asks if she wants any paper or anything she has not got ; gives her a copy of her own evidence typewritten ; returns to his table.*

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*Bowing across*). Now, my dear young lady, I will just explain our usual custom. Sometimes, when we have a learned gentleman like the one who has just left us, we ask him to give us a little speech, but, in other cases, we content ourselves with the *précis* which you sent in of your evidence, which I may say our good Mr. Nathaniel Facer has typewritten out and presented us all with, and I am sure we have all read——

He looks beamingly round to the Commission and most of them agree with a half-guilty look, and search for the paper they had not read thoroughly.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. —so that you will be spared any difficulty at all about making a speech to us. Now, what we do is simply to ask questions one by one about what you said to us in this—(FACER *hands paper over his L shoulder*)—account of your views.

HE speaks to her in a very encouraging, paternal fashion, and the girl quiets her fears and sits waiting, bowing slightly to the Commission.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Now, Miss Carrillon, you, of course, are quite a young lady ; indeed, I might almost say, such a very young lady, that we are rather surprised that you are interested in these things.

EVADNE. I wasn't interested until recently, when I went down slumming, as they call it, and I saw such dreadful things the poor people were suffering.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*looking round at others*). Ah, yes, yes, alas, we know how much suffering there is in the world.

BROTHER PETER. Alas!

EVADNE (*waiting, as if for a question, no question coming says :*) But I think there ought *not* to be, and I think we could stop it ; (*stops at reaction of Commission and looks round*) at least, we could do a great deal to reduce it, and that is why I sent in my paper asking you as a Commissioner in your report to make a statement in favour of birth control—so that these poor women should not have all these wretched unhealthy children they do not want.

MRS. SWEETHOLM *coughs*.

Uncomfortable pause and looks to each other from Commission.

DR. VERRO HODGES *while she speaks watches her with a mixture of admiration and anxiety.*

LADY HIGHKNO *looks more and more haughty, takes up her lorgnette and looks exceedingly shocked that such a pronouncement should have been made. She then turns hurriedly to paper with which she has been previously supplied, and seeing its contents, acquires a hostile look on her face, as do most of the Commission.*

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Now, I am not going to monopolise you, and as my dear friend and colleague is now here, this time the questions will begin on my left.

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*rises*). I have, I may say, my dear Miss Carrillon, studied your very—girlish—very impulsive, very *young*, if I may say so, expression of opinion, and I am profoundly shocked, shocked. It is indeed a sign of the age when such a purely materialistic suggestion should be made towards the solution of a problem which is so highly ethical. I must therefore ask you whether you seriously expect the Commission to take into consideration your views, or whether you would not, on our advice, withdraw and leave us to consider the matter on the lines of maturer, and I assure you, of well-wishing, but—(*pauses,*

fishing for the word, and CHAIRMAN telling him, looks at CHAIRMAN)—more experienced, and, if I may say so, wiser consideration than you have obviously had time to give to it.

EVADNE (*looking at first rather crushed, but then cheering up under this attack, says*). No, my lord. I want my views put forward. I want them to be considered. I want it to convert you.

(*Amused murmur.*)

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*smiles in a rather sardonic fashion*). Convert us? My dear young lady, you are turning the tables.

EVADNE. Well, they want turning.

COMMISSION *at attention.*

I feel, do not you, about tables, rather what Christ said about platters; outside it is all fair and clean, but within—you remember—ravensing wickedness.

(*Awkward pause.*)

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*very shocked*). My dear, may I, as you have no experience of *commissions*—may I point out to you that we are here as a serious body to consider not warm feelings so much as *serious* and *considered facts*. Have you any grounds for imagining—*serious* and *considered* grounds, I mean—not just hasty expressions of opinion—have you any serious grounds for imagining that such a crude, materialistic means as preventing the birth of the children in the slums would touch the questions of poverty, of disease and of misery which have haunted the world since Christ said: "The poor ye have always with you."

EVADNE. Yes, I have. At any rate, the opinion of others who have studied, that we are in a world of evolution and we are sensible enough to control our evolution if we will.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*nodding and leaning forward to CHAIRMAN*). Just what Professor Beverley Black said.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*shakes his head*). Put to another purpose.

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Evolution, yes ; but evolution on the lines of nature, not against it. Do you not see that birth control is absolutely against nature ?

EVADNE. No more against human nature than the use of chloroform.

(*Nod of assent from DR. HODGES.*)

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*shrugs his shoulders and sits back in his chair*). Pass. (*Turns to MRS. SWEETHOLM.*)

THE CHAIRMAN *turns to MRS. S. and calls on her.*

MRS. SWEETHOLM (*rises*). Now, my dear, I have only one question. *Don't* you think that for a young lady like you to take up these terribly serious questions, which really only—well—married people can understand, is being extremely foolish ?

EVADNE. No. For when people are older and are married, they have their own troubles. It seems only while they are young they seem to have heart or time for the world's troubles.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Ah, my dear, but you should be enjoying life ; you should be doing what young ladies of your age used to do, you should be dancing, you should be making people happy.

EVADNE (*with a quiet, set voice*). I am trying to make people happy. By first telling these poor people that if they——

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Well, my dear, I do not think I will ask you any questions about the *details* of your views.

EVADNE, *feeling rather crushed, almost in tears, turns to*
THE REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD.

CHAIRMAN *looks over to PRITCHARD.*

REV. PRITCHARD (*speaks as though from the pulpit*). I am inclined to be willing to listen, however young (*look at BISHOP OXBRIDGE, who resents it*) to the mouth which is prepared to teach me. I do not forget that our Lord said "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings" and, as this young lady has the advantage of having some first-hand slumming experience——

BROTHER PETER *mumbles, but stops at look from PRITCHARD.*

—I should like to ask her what kind of family, for instance, would she recommend us to advise to use birth control ?

EVADNE. Any family where the mother is ill ; any family where the children that are being born are diseased, wretched ; any family where the babies *always* die. (*There is a little hint of a sob in her voice.*) Do you know there is a woman in the room above the one where I visit who has had three babies in four years, all dead, and she is now in bed for weeks and months herself. That is wrong—wrong.

REV. PRITCHARD. It was wrong. (*Nodding in agreement.*) You would then, I understand, recommend that birth control should be used only by those who are in some shape or form diseased or unfitted for parenthood or whose children are themselves unfitted for this world's duties ?

EVADNE. Yes, that is what I think.

REV. PRITCHARD. I think that many people will be in agreement with you.

BROTHER PETER. I disassociate myself—— (*Rises and sits again.*)

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Chair, chair.

REV. PRITCHARD. But there is the practical difficulty of how such knowledge shall reach those persons and no others. Have you any suggestion on that score ?

EVADNE. Yes. Through the Ministry of Health——
ALL *look at* SIR THEODORE RAVAGE.

—but details I leave for you to settle. I only came to beg you as a Commission to advise birth control in such cases of misery as I have seen.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*calls on movement as if to speak*). Dr. Hodges.

DR. HODGES (*then asks*). I understand that it is your view that if these helplessly miserable little children were not born we should not harm our total population, we should only be sparing ourselves the misery of premature deaths of infants or of unwanted and unsatisfactory children?

EVADNE (*eagerly*). Yes, that is so. Don't you see, women want healthy children, they love them. But when the mothers are ill, tired, poor, and over-worked, they cannot bear them properly; and I cannot see what good to the State diseased, miserable, half-witted people can ever do; it's waste, sheer waste.

DR. HODGES. Thank you.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. But you will agree, will you not? my dear young lady, that the Government, while considering *individuals*, so far as possible, *must first* consider the *international* relations of the *country*. How could we permit to be let loose on the community with public approval, such a dangerous source of race suicide as the widespread knowledge of birth control which you advocate. I see— (*he turns over the papers in front of him*) I see that you even advocate that the Ministry of Health should be ordered by Parliament to give officially such instruction to all poor women who *think* they require it.

EVADNE. Yes, I do. The rich *have* the knowledge. The poor need it more. I say the Ministry of Health ought to provide access to such knowledge for the poor. They provide milk for starving mothers; they provide welfare

centres for the babies *after* they are born ; they provide ante-natal clinics to secure healthy mothers as well as they can. You cannot have healthy mothers if they are forced by ignorance to be mothers when they are ill. I say it is the business of the State to prevent disease breeding disease and the poor breeding through the coercion of ignorance !

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. Can you not see that no Government could cut the nation's throat in this manner ? We *depend* for our national stability on a growing population.

EVADNE. But what *kind* of growth have we to-day ? Didn't you notice in your own Government's report this year that the number of lunatics is greater than it has ever been before ? They do not make our nation stronger.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*making a written note*). That is true. That is a very good point, but you do not surely intimate that lunatics would use birth control.

BROTHER PETER. Only the lunatics would use birth control.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*offended*). Sir, that is so trivial an interpretation of what I meant. It is obvious, is it not, Miss Carrillon, that those who are mentally deficient, those who are, I agree, a deplorable drag upon the community, are exactly those who would not be in a position intelligently to use the information which you propose the Government should give them ?

EVADNE. Yes, in some cases.

DR. HODGES (*seated*). Then I suppose you agree the Government should step in and sterilise them.

A shock of horror convulses the whole Commission.

BROTHER PETER (*looks black*). Sterilise !

EVADNE. Yes, I think so, otherwise the worst kind of babies would be born.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*rises*). Compulsory sterilisation is a totally different problem. You are there asking for abolition of the liberty of the individual.

EVADNE. Yes, and that is why I did not say anything about it.

LADY HIGHKNO *whispers to him*.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. Quite right. We are going, I think, too far. (*He turns, sitting back in his seat, to* LADY HIGHKNO.)

LADY HIGHKNO. I am shocked, inexpressibly shocked, at a young lady of breeding such as I know your family would be likely to have produced, coming before an audience with such a proposition! I need ask you only one question. (*Raising her lorgnette and speaking crushingly.*) Where, if you had your way and taught the poor birth control, from *where* do you think we would get our supply of servants?

EVADNE (*quickly, with flushed cheeks, half rising in anger*). Lady Highkno, you had twelve servants in your house and only two children. What would you have done with twelve children and no servants?

(*No answer.*)

You would make *slaves* of poor mothers so that you may avoid your own duties?

LADY HIGHKNO (*does not answer beyond saying*). Really, really. Shocking! Disgraceful! (*Fluttering her papers and turning her head away.*)

BROTHER PETER (*clears table in front of him*). Now, my dear young lady, you have brought before us the most extraordinary views, most extraordinary views! But of course I know these insidious and immoral practices are creeping in and getting a great hold upon the community. I would ask you, therefore, have you read Holy Writ on this subject? Don't you realise that the suggestions you

are making—innocently, I believe and with a good heart on behalf of the poor—do you realise that those *suggestions* are against the laws of God?

EVADNE. I don't think so.

BROTHER PETER. *You* don't think so?

EVADNE. It cannot be the law of God to bring diseased babies into the world. Therefore it must be God's wish that we should discover how to *avoid* doing that.

BROTHER PETER (*rising in a heated way*). Now, I must denounce absolutely— (*Rises and sits again.*)

DR. HODGES (*turning quickly to BROTHER PETER*). But I want to begin to understand what is your ethical warrant for saying it is right to bring diseased children into the world, and on the other hand, wrong to *use* a simple thing like birth control to prevent the begetting of *un-healthy* children? What standard of right and wrong, whether in Holy Writ or outside it, do you refer to?

BROTHER PETER. We take *marriage* as a definitely appointed means of *procreation*. It is a step which is not compulsory. The individual need not accept it, but if he does accept it he must accept it for what it is, and therefore, if he does exercise the *rights* of marriage, he must exercise them in a way which *of itself* is not calculated to *defeat* that end.

EVADNE (*her eyes on fire*). Then you consider it is right to breed diseased children, but wrong to use simple birth control methods to *prevent* those diseased children coming?

BROTHER PETER. Ah, because the disease would be accidental, an accidental consequence.

EVADNE. Not accidental if they know that they are diseased. Do you mean to say it would be less wrong for them to undertake the almost certainty of creating diseased children, less wrong than to use simple birth control?

BROTHER PETER. Yes, certainly it would.

EVADNE (*shocked*). Oh, but this is dreadful.

DR. HODGES (*as if to protect her and to take up the cudgels on her behalf*). Brother Peter, let us take the case of two hereditary deaf mutes, imbeciles.

BROTHER PETER. I should stand to the principle even in that case. Certainly we should do our best to deter them from marrying, but at the same time they should not be refused marriage, and if they marry they must take the consequences.

EVADNE (*leaning forward, her hands stretched, eager, an intense look on her face*). But, Brother Peter, *they* do not take the consequences ; *it is the child that takes the consequences* ; it is the *child* that bears the misery ; and the suffering.

BROTHER PETER, *sitting back with his jaws clenched, does not answer.*

DR. HODGES. And not only the child ; it is the community that suffers. The community has to bear that burden, to pay for that contaminating disease spot in its midst.

THE TWO BISHOPS *begin to look exceedingly uncomfortable, and the two ladies absolutely shocked.*

Brother Peter, from whence do you deduce this absolutely uncompromising view of marriage ?

BROTHER PETER. It is what we should call the constant teaching of the Church from the beginning—(*he speaks with an air of finality*)—that is definite. We also base it on the Genesis argument of Scripture.

EVADNE (*quickly and cynically*). In other words, tradition—tradition with a capital T.

BROTHER PETER (*looking very angrily at her*). Certainly.

DR. HODGES. Well, then, what about people who are

hopelessly feeble-minded, hopelessly degenerate? They may be sterilised.

A shock of horror goes round the Commission, but SIR THEODORE RAVAGE begins to look more and more interested, and leans as though waiting to hear more.

BROTHER PETER. I condemn sterilisation totally.

DR. HODGES (*again intervening*). But you would have no objection to segregation in the interests of the State?

BROTHER PETER. Yes, I object to that—that is to us Earlyans absolutely prohibiting the individual from exercising his liberty to get married.

EVADNE (*more and more astonished*). You are absolutely opposed to the segregation of the feeble-minded? You would let them marry? Let them have children?

BROTHER PETER. If you say you want them compulsorily locked up and say that they shall never marry, we would not sanction that.

EVADNE. Oh, but wait, if the woman who was to bear the child would die—would die—if it was known that she would die if she bore the child?

BROTHER PETER. She must die someday. What a glorious privilege that she may before doing so create another soul for the service of God! (*Sits well back in chair.*)

EVADNE (*her feelings beyond control*). Oh, how wicked. (*Crosses to table.*) How cruel! Oh! (*She turns to the Commission.*) You people sitting here to rule others—how cruel you are! Oh, and how short-sighted! Don't you see the workhouses and the hospitals and the lunatic asylums filling up, always filling up more and more with these wretched lives you are forcing upon the world by coercing the poor and miserable. Oh, I thought you might help me, but if you all feel like that——

THEY *variously avert their heads or do not make any sign*

of agreement, except the REVEREND GODFREY PRITCHARD, he says :

REV. PRITCHARD (*rises*). We do not all feel like that. Don't forget Brother Peter is an Earlyan. I am a Unitarian. (*Grunts from BROTHER PETER.*) We do not think on all points alike. (*Sits.*)

EVADNE (*turns*). But you, lord Bishop ?

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Ah, my dear young lady, the Christian doctrines we hold in common cannot be flouted.

EVADNE (*rises*). Oh, you don't *care* ; you don't care, any of you !

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. My dear Miss Carrillon, we are here not to spend emotion on mere intellectual problems, but to give grave consideration to the serious *facts* of the important population problems now before our nation.

EVADNE (*eagerly*). But our nation is all composed of individual lives, of individual homes——

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Doubtless. But *individual* considerations mislead statistics.

EVADNE (*with sobs in her voice*). In statistics a human life is only a figure on a bit of paper—but *really* it may be a breaking heart——

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Our business——

EVADNE. Surely you should study the individuals. Mere paper-statistics are so misleading. Please hear the evidence of one of them herself. Here's a slum woman I know come to tell you what her life means—and she has had twelve children—twelve—see and hear—Mrs. Flinker.

MR. FACER (*rises*). The Commission does not see mere individuals as witnesses.

EVADNE. It *should*. Please, oh please, for my sake——

for our country's sake—see and get her to make you understand her life—see Mrs. Flinker.

THE COMMISSION *is all very stolid and uncomfortable.*

MR. FACER. Ah, my dear young lady, you are asking too much! (*Comes round to her.*)

EVADNE. Asking too much that you should know at first hand the lives you play with as ciphers on paper!

MR. FACER *soothingly collects her things and gently implies she should go. Rustle of papers.*

You have no hearts—they are withered up—and only rustling paper in their place. (*All shame-facedly stop rustle. She speaks with fiery scorn.*) You think you are helping the nation by hiding your heads under blue papers—oh, our amiable ostriches!

MR. FACER *opens door and goes L to EVADNE. THEY look stolidly hostile.*

MR. FACER *is gently impelling her to go.*

EVADNE (*with a sob*). You have no hearts. . . outside real people need help—you could give and won't—and I must go—*alone* and try to help them!

SHE *goes blindly out sobbing uncontrollably.*

MR. FACER *opens the door and leaves it wide.*

DR. HODGES *jumps up.*

DR. HODGES (*rises. Speaks in a whirlwind of anger*). May I say, my lord, that I think the Commission should have taken more into consideration the youth and the tender heart of our last witness. Undoubtedly she has seen at first-hand very grave problems, which as at present codified, the Christian tenets have not begun to touch. They *must* be dealt with.

BROTHER PETER (*looking up, laughing rather insolently*). So you are a convert to youth's impetuosity?

DR. HODGES. I am. I long have been. Not perhaps in favour of the open propaganda Miss Carrillon would

like. But undoubtedly we *must* have Government action, securing information free at all big centres for those who need it. (*To BROTHER PETER.*) You said just now that if people *did* marry they must take the consequences——

BROTHER PETER. Certainly——

DR. HODGES. But wait—I have looked up your theologians—Liguori and others—you allow that two married people *may* use *one* method—the most completely effective method of birth control there is——

BROTHER PETER (*hurriedly*). No—no—nonsense.

DR. HODGES (*accusingly*). Yes. You allow two married people although married to live apart entirely—live apart in the same house.

BROTHER PETER. Ah! that is self control——

DR. HODGES. But effectively controls birth.

BROTHER PETER. Not by the sin of birth control, but by the virtue of self control.

DR. HODGES. But that is no more natural.

BROTHER PETER. Umph!

DR. HODGES. Are the Mr. Flinkers going to ask for such grace? And how can they exercise it in the same bed with their wives if they do? How many men are able to bear such a restraint on their married rights? And (*intensely and conflictingly*) how many prostitutes are called into being by their failure?

BROTHER PETER. Who knows——

DR. HODGES. Who *cares*, you mean! Here am I echoing Miss Carrillon's cry—Have you a heart—that you would rather see girls in the slavery of prostitution than happy wives instructed by science in how to *keep* their husband's love?

BROTHER PETER. You're twisting it—we *don't* approve of prostitution.

DR. HODGES. Yet you prefer the method of birth control that leads straight to prostitution, to scientific birth control which destroys the *demand* for prostitution.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Really, I must ask you to spare the ladies——

DR. HODGES (*shrugging*). So, Brother Peter, you always escape the searchlight of a true enquiry.

A look of stolid endurance is on all the COMMISSIONERS' faces. He glances quickly from one to the other ; not one responds.

Milord, may I move a resolution that we do, as a Commission, see Mrs. Flinker, or someone like her ? (*Looks round the table.*)

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*impassively*). Will anyone second the resolution ?

Pause, and then speaking to THE CHAIRMAN.

DR. HODGES. Well, milord, if I cannot find a seconder to my resolution, I suppose I shall have to withdraw it.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. I'm afraid so. (*Sighs all round.*)

DR. HODGES (*cooler, but still angry*). But I see I am wasting your time and my time too. I too had better go. My lord, I beg to tender my resignation as a member of this Commission because I feel that it is not out to study actual facts in a spirit likely to lead to any useful result.

Noise of MRS. FLINKER outside. The whole Commission are fidgety and uncomfortable, but he bows civilly ; they all bow very civilly to him as he strides out through the open door.

MR. FACER *is busy making notes.*

MRS. FLINKER *bursts through the door in a flaming rage, gets well into the centre of the room and faces the COMMISSION in a truculent way, arms akimbo, hat over one eye, breathing heavily.*

MRS. FLINKER. I will come in—you leave me alone.

(*Enters L. C.*)

So you're the lot that has done 'er down, are yer? A bloomin' fine lot, too, I don't fink.

FACER *tries to take hold of her. She throws him off, and says* : "Get out."

Astonished consternation and bewilderment expressed by all the COMMISSION in keeping with their characters.

MRS. FLINKER. 'Ow many kids 'ave yer got among yer, the 'ole bloomin' lot of yer—two apiece? (*Her voice rises shriller and shriller.*) Not much, not 'arf, I s'y—mor'n 'arf of yer bein' men.

LADY HIGHKNO. She must go.

REV. PRITCHARD. I don't know—now she is here—why not let us hear her?

LADY HIGHKNO. And be done with it.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. And be done with it. The public will not be satisfied that we have been fair to the evidence unless we hear at least *one* woman from the slums.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*suavely*). Mr. Facer! Mr. Facer! We will hear Mrs.—er——

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Flinker.

MR. FACER. Very good, my lord.

He brings chair forward. MRS. FLINKER goes to her place
U L.

MRS. FLINKER (*turning with a grin of triumph to MR. FACER*). Yer see.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. You are Mrs. Flinker brought by Miss Carrillon?

MRS. FLINKER. Yes, bless 'er 'eart.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Now what evidence have you for us?

MRS. FLINKER (*rises. A little taken aback, and over to table U L C.*) Evidence? That's fer perlice. I ain't nothin' to do with perlice.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. No, no. What was it you wanted to say to *us*?

MRS. FLINKER (*unabashed*). Thank you, sir. Only that you're MEN! That's all yer are. Men, I s'y, and wot's men? Git us into trouble orl rite, oh yus, but wot d'yer know abaht wot yer talkin' of?

BROTHER PETER (*trying to exert his clerical authority*). Silence woman! or be civil.

MRS. FLINKER. Silence, me hat! I ain't done wiv yer yet not by a long chalk, I ain't.

BROTHER PETER. Now, my good woman.

MRS. FLINKER. Woman, hindeed. I'm the lidy wot 'as the kids, let me remind yer.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Yes, yes, of course—so good of you.

MRS. FLINKER (*to BROTHER PETER, ignoring her*). You tike yer 'at off to mother'ood, I says, wen it's mother'ood in a church, but wot yer do wen it's mother'ood in a slum? Oof it out double quick!

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*soothingly*). Really, Madam, really, you are labouring under a mistake. I assure you we all, *all* have your interests *deeply* at heart.

MRS. FLINKER (*laughing derisively*). 'Eart! You ain't got none, not one of you 'aven't, or you wouldn't 'ave 'urt my dear young lidy like you 'ave now. 'Eartless yer are, orl the lot of yer. 'Eartless.

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. No, no, not——

MRS. FLINKER. 'Eartless cads, that's wot yer are, orl the lot of yer. Just becos my poor dear sweet young lidy tries to show yer up to yerselves yer give 'er 'ell and

drive 'er out cryin'. Well, you shan't mike me cry, it's you'll be cryin' afore yer get me out ov this room, that I tells yer—yer know, yus.

BROTHER PETER. Leave the room at once.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE *calls for* FACER.

FACER *comes down to her* R.

MRS. FLINKER. I've done wiv yer preachin' Brother Peter for one. Orl them pennies fer penance and candles and orl the time the more kids I've carried the more you've 'ad to bury and their prayers paid for.

BROTHER PETER. Eternal shame upon you.

MRS. FLINKER. Yer talk ter me wen *you've* had twelve kids sime as I 'ave.

MR. FACER (*taking her arm*). Come, come, you must leave the room.

MRS. FLINKER (*shaking him off as easily as brushing away a fly*). And 'oo are you? 'Ave you borne twelve kids yerself?

MR. FACER. Shocking—indeed——

MRS. FLINKER. Shockin', it is too, that them as 'asn't borne kids should dare to insult me 'oo 'as.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*advancing towards her*). Not at all—there is nothing meant but that this is a private room and there are ladies present who——

MRS. FLINKER (*she breaks off from FACER and comes back*). Lidies who 'aven't borne the kids neither. I knew wot yer mean. 'Er! (*Pointing to* LADY HIGHKNO.)

LADY HIGHKNO (*jumping up*). Leave the room at once, you—you——

MRS. FLINKER. You dare speak to me !

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE *signs to* FACER *to leave her alone*.

Me wot knows your new cook—intimate—bein' me 'us-

band's sister—and your lidy's maid from sittin' in your own kitchen over a cup of tea twice this last month, and *they* told me you didn't get only two kids just by nature—not arf—but yer'd stop *me* knowin' 'ow to stop at me twelfth. You rich folk know some dodge you won't let us poor folk know.

BISHOP *signs to FACER to take her out.*

LADY HIGHKNO (*utters inarticulate sounds of rage and splutters*). Gentlemen——

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*rises*). Come, out you go. Facer! Facer!

Advances determinedly on her and takes her by both arms and endeavours to propel her toward the door.

SHE resists and struggles a bit but is really almost as strong as they are in her determined rage. Her diatribe is now punctured by heavy breathing, "Ohs, Ahs and Hush-hush."

MRS. FLINKER. Where'd yer git yer servants if we pore wimmin knew? Not out of my hanguish I can tell yer.

MRS. SWEETHOLM *giggles and then is ashamed of herself.*

MR. FACER *has got her almost to the door.* MRS. SWEETHOLM *dabs LADY HIGHKNO's eyes with her own handkerchief and pats her hand.* LADY HIGHKNO *hasn't quite made up her mind whether it is better breeding to cry or not to cry.*

MRS. SWEETHOLM. I'm sure you always give your servants such *good* food.

MRS. FLINKER (*turning on her captors*). You black beetles. You talk abaht my pore little 'uns bein' in 'eaven. Don't yer never think wot it feels like ter 'ave to just tear up yer body wiv 'em coming and then tear yer 'eart wiv 'em goin'?

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*panting and still endeavouring to be diplomatic*). So sad, oh, so sad——

BROTHER PETER. The will of God.

MRS. FLINKER (*losing the last shred of control, almost screams—snatches and tears at them in her fury*). Sky pilots. Yer've never borne even one kid and yer tryin' to push us wimmin into the 'ell of never stoppin' bearin' 'em. Oh, it's funny, that's wot it is, funny! (*Laughs hysterically and is pushed out laughing in a half choking manner.*) Exit. The door is slammed on her and also MR. FACER with her.

THE TWO BISHOPS, *perspiring and somewhat dishevelled, wipe their faces, pull down their sleeves, straighten their aprons and are trying to compose themselves as they return to their places. The whole Commission is just beginning to succeed in calming themselves when the door is suddenly and very quietly opened and MRS. FLINKER pops her head in again round the door.*

MRS. FLINKER. Yah! The pore will find out what you rich wimmin know even if yer do interfere with 'em. You ain't mothers, so stop interferin' with them as is mothers. Stop interferin', I says. (*Withdraws her head suddenly and slams the door to. Relief in all faces, but a continued uneasy anxiety is evident and glances toward the door continue.*)

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. This has indeed been a terrible afternoon. Not at all in the spirit in which our Commission is usually held.

The door begins to open. ALL give way to nerves and the BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE and THE REVEREND PRITCHARD jump up and press against it to keep it shut.

MR. FACER enters, shuts the door firmly, and comes up to his place. Hands a paper to the CHAIRMAN.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. We have, I think, next week,

a reasoned and quite serious witness (*sighs of relief from whole Commission*). Mrs. Tatham——

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Oh, I knew her quite well. You know it was when her late husband was alive——

BISHOP glares at her and she shuts up.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. —from the League for the National Perfection of the Race. She will, I feel sure, bring acceptable evidence and in a proper spirit. I feel as your Chairman that I have perhaps mishandled this afternoon's affairs——

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Oh, no, not at all.

LADY HIGHKNO. Very tactful.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. But you will all agree with me that with youth at the helm the ship is apt to get off the usual track.

There is a murmur of conciliatory assent. They quiet down. Turn to MR. FACER with an eager air as though desiring reassuring conventionalities.

MR. FACER. My lord and members of the Commission. We are, as you may remember, expecting Professor Sir William Beveridge, to give evidence this afternoon.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Sir William Beveridge? Oh, yes, of the School of Economics.

A universal sigh of relief. They shake down their ruffled feathers and look more placid.

MR. FACER. Alas, he is delayed. Might I meanwhile save time by reading his *précis* which you have not yet had?

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. By all means, Facer.

ALL assent with relief and settle quietly in to listen. MR.

NATHANIEL FACER crosses quietly to the witness chair, where he stands and begins to read in a soothing voice.

MR. FACER (*reading from SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE*).

Professor Sir William Beveridge says: "The impression that the civilised world is already threatened with over-population is very common to-day. Yet it is certain that enormous areas of the earth which are fit for cultivation are not cultivated at all, and that of other areas only the surface has been scratched. . . There is in the statistics I shall place before you nothing. . .

Business from rest of Commission.

Sits R end of table. He very slowly subsides into his seat as he reads, an air of calm settles. He continues in soothing voice to read:

. . . "to suggest that Europe had reached its economic climax before the war. Man for his present troubles has to accuse neither the niggardliness of Nature nor his own instinct of reproduction, but other instincts as primitive and in excess as fatal to Utopian dreams. He has to find a remedy *elsewhere* than in birth control. Examination of economic tendencies before the war yields no ground for alarm as to the immediate future of mankind—no justification for Malthusian panic. . . " (*Dies out in drone.*)

THE COMMISSION is now gently appreciative, absolute peace and calm reigns after the storm, an atmosphere of interminable beatitude settles on all. His last words come singly and softly as the light fades and the impression is created he is going on for hours.

The stage is blacked out for a minute.

(Curtain.)

ACT III

SCENE II

The stage at once lights up again, supposed to be an hour later. The Commissioners have risen and are slowly going, chatting to each other. THE REVEREND GODFREY PRITCHARD yawns and rises to join the BISHOP OF CHELMGATE and BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE, who are chatting animatedly while slowly collecting their belongings and putting on their coats, etc.

FACER rising.

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*Up L*). With a high wind behind one of course the drive was splendid: poor play on the green though——

LADY HIGHKNO is evidently finishing a long chat with SIR THEODORE RAVAGE, which has interested her and bored him.

LADY HIGHKNO (*R above table*). I have had three men spraying them for days, but it is no good.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*trying to hear the golf conversation*). Really! (*Goes R to get hat.*)

LADY HIGHKNO (*L C*). But what can you expect? If you have canker in the bud it's ridiculous to expect azalea flowers. But it is so unfortunate, they are our chief beauty at this season and the Prime Minister is coming for the week-end. . .

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*crosses to FACER R*). Ah! He politely disentangles himself by turning to FACER who passes collecting papers from the table.

Ah, Facer. What about that——

THEY talk apart.

BROTHER PETER (*to* LADY HIGHKNO). So I can *absolutely* count on you as a hostess to my Charity Ball?

LADY HIGHKNO. Yes. Yes. Anything in the sacred cause of charity.

BROTHER PETER (*at top of table*). I'm glad indeed we are so united in service—the poor will bless you——

LADY HIGHKNO (*at top of table*). Now, I want you to do something for me——

BROTHER PETER *looks alarmed, then smiles*.

will you dine and meet——

BROTHER PETER'S *face relaxes into a broad smile of relief and anticipation*. THEY *talk apart*.

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*down s l. Chuckling audibly*). Yes. I holed out in *one—one*. Ah, that's a tonic.

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Yes, a tonic indeed.

MR. FACER *is near the door*. EVADNE *comes in, but looks surprised to find them all there*.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE *crosses to c*.

Business FACER *clearing tables, etc*.

EVADNE, *still eager and even more intense after her long wait and the resolution she has formed, goes eagerly up to the* BISHOP OF CHELMGATE.

EVADNE (c). Oh, my lord. Have you decided?

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (l c *detaches himself from the golfers*). BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE *looks at her and draws away*). Decided, my dear? What? We are not here to *decide* but to investigate.

EVADNE. Oh, yes, yes—but have you decided to investigate Mrs. Flinker's case?

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Ah! hardly, hardly. We are dealing with broad principles. That takes *time*. What a hot-headed little thing it is——

EVADNE. But is the Commission going to *do* anything about what I said ?

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. It's not for us to *do*, my dear.

EVADNE (*retreats a step or two, looks at him with a deep amazement growing into scorn*). Then it is left for me to *do*——

THE BISHOP *turns away. She touches his sleeve.*

All you great, learned and powerful people leave it to one alone to *do* what must be done ?

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. No, no. Oh, no, no. Now I really must run away. (*Crosses to door.*)

EVADNE. You all leave it just as it was ?

SHE *tries to waylay the others, but they ignore her.*

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Au revoir.

Goes off.

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE *goes and* SIR THEODORE RAVAGE *joins the golfers——move out talking.*

LADY HIGHKNO *buttonholes* MRS. SWEETHOLM.

LADY HIGHKNO (U L C). Just think—canker in the bud——

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Oh, my dear, how dreadful.

LADY HIGHKNO. All my azaleas—ruined.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Oh, how dreadful, dreadful (*speaking very distinctly and with grave concern*) I know an infallible remedy. You must try it. Soft soap—sprayed on—blown on.

THEY *go out together, and their voices reverberate in the hall.*

Business LADY HIGHKNO *going off very dignified, MRS. SWEETHOLM running round her talking wildly.*

EVADNE *is left alone, with MR. FACER whose task is nearly finished.*

EVADNE *is sitting on chair R by T R.*

MR. FACER (*aside to her*). Of course, my dear young lady, you know, I need not say how grieved I was this afternoon—I can assure you. I have been secretary of this Birth Control Commission for years, and never has there been such an exhibition of feeling! Ah, my dear, the tender feelings of youth are too much for us. Youth should have protection from such considerations. I hope that this won't distress you too much.

EVADNE. No, thank you. It *hardens* me. That does me good, I expect.

MR. FACER. Do not allow yourself to get hard-hearted, my dear young lady, that would be too terrible. Lord Simplex will have a very sad time if you become hard-hearted, my dear young lady.

EVADNE (*laughing, moving away from him and sitting down on a chair*). Well, he is coming to fetch me, with mother, so I will sit here and try to soften my heart while you finish attending to your papers.

In a moment or two door L B opens and MRS. CARRILLON and LORD SIMPLEX appear and go behind table L in front of it.

FACER *going up to door meets MRS. CARRILLON entering.*

MRS. CARRILLON (*C door*). Mr. Facer, is that bad child of mine here? I am afraid I am late. (*Beckons LORD SIMPLEX.*)

EVADNE (*rises*). Hello, Mother!

LORD SIMPLEX *advances across the room.*

MRS. CARRILLON. Oh, Mr. Facer, will you show me those pamphlets?

Exit with FACER.

EVADNE (*in a flat, dispirited way*). Hello, Reginald.

LORD SIMPLEX. Hello, my dear.

EVADNE. Well, I got into a nice hole this afternoon.
(*Over LC front of table on which she places her bag, leaving it.*)

LORD SIMPLEX. Dear! Now, didn't I tell you? (*By her at table.*)

EVADNE. But I've found one ally.

LORD SIMPLEX. Oh, who?

EVADNE. Dr. Hodges.

LORD SIMPLEX. That old sawbones.

EVADNE. Maybe, but those poor women in the slums would rather see him than you any day.

LORD SIMPLEX. Let 'em. I never want ever to go to the slums again.

EVADNE. No? But I do, and I'm going.

LORD SIMPLEX (*they exchange rather challenging glances*). Well, for a little time perhaps. (*He gets more determined.*) Not after you are married, dear.

EVADNE. What? You would interfere? (*Hand on table.*)

LORD SIMPLEX. A husband must take care of his wife.
(*Places hand on hers.*)

EVADNE. Tell me. (*She puts her hand on his sleeve, looks insistently into his face.*) When I am your wife, will you obey your Church against birth control?

LORD SIMPLEX (*rather sheepishly*). I should—but—at least you know the way our class does obey—

EVADNE. What is that way? Brother Peter said that you must obey absolutely.

LORD SIMPLEX (*very uncomfortable*). Well, but I say, that is not the kind of thing we need talk about. Oh, rot, come along to tea. You're tired.

EVADNE. No, I won't come along.

LORD SIMPLEX. What is the matter ?

EVADNE. We have got to have this out.

LORD SIMPLEX *very uncomfortable, sits on table.*

My mother has only had three children. But down in the slums there are six, eight, ten, eleven, twelve—oh, and more. It isn't only *chance* that our class only have small families. It isn't just accident. I might as your wife be year after year bearing sickly children I did not want. Because I don't want delicate ones—I am not going to have them.

LORD SIMPLEX (*exceedingly uncomfortable*). Really, er—don't think about things like that. Counting your chickens—what! Perhaps you won't have any. You never can tell.

EVADNE. Oh, but I want some—I love them—but I *won't be a slave of chance*—

LORD SIMPLEX. We all are.

EVADNE. Oh, but that is just it, I won't. I won't be—a slave of chance like those poor women that I have seen. Oh, Reginald, I wish you had been with me and seen them. Come with me and see them, to *understand*.

LORD SIMPLEX (*laughing in an uncomfortable way—just a short laugh*). My dear girl, it would make me too beastly uncomfortable.

EVADNE. Reginald, you are an Earlyan. Would you obey the priest if my life depended on it ?

HE *looks very uncomfortable, hesitates.*

EVADNE. Tell me, would you disobey your priest to save me, or would you risk making my life a hell by obeying him ?

LORD SIMPLEX (*rises and crosses to her, a look of serious discomfort, almost horror on his face*). Neither, neither.

Why should I, Evadne? You are worked up, you are hysterical. Come on to tea.

SHE moves away from him—critically examines him. She takes off the sapphire ring.

EVADNE. No, never! I have seen too much these last two months. I have heard enough to-day. *I am not going to risk life with you—there is your ring.*

(Business.)

LORD SIMPLEX. Evadne, you are not serious.

EVADNE. Yes, if you feel like that.

Pause. LORD SIMPLEX is hard hit, but takes it in silence. She turns away.

LORD SIMPLEX. I say, Evadne.

She keeps her head turned away and gives him no answer. Places the ring in his pocket, picks up hat and stick.

EVADNE *(calls)*. Mother.

A long pause.

MRS. CARRILLON *enters C.*

EVADNE. Mother, I am sorry. But please say good-bye to Reginald. Let him go and do not worry me.

MRS. CARRILLON. Oh, my dear, you have not quarrelled? Oh, my dears!

EVADNE *(turning away commandingly)*. Please.

MRS. CARRILLON *looks from one to the other, sighs. She fusses and goes out of the room with LORD SIMPLEX who turns as though to appeal to EVADNE, but she turns her back on him as he goes out rather disconsolate, holding high his head when he hears MRS. CARRILLON say:*

MRS. CARRILLON. She is worked up. Do not pay any attention to her—this ridiculous Commission to-day.

THEY go out together, as though concocting a plan. EVADNE sinks on to the chair. She looks straight before her, almost relief on her face. The door opens and DR. HODGES comes in.

DR. HODGES. Oh, I say, Facer, have you—oh!

HE looks about on the table and picks up a small notebook, which he had obviously dropped, puts it into his pocket.

EVADNE rises.

Turning to go out he sees EVADNE.

DR. HODGES. Hello, you here still!

EVADNE. Yes, I came to meet mother here. (*Crosses to table for her bag.*)

DR. HODGES. Of course. May I say again (*he comes forward to her*) how splendid you were; you shattered them with a bit of real feeling; real truth. You will do great things if you stick at it.

EVADNE. Surely woman must help woman.

The door opens. MRS. CARRILLON comes forward, exceedingly annoyed to see DR. HODGES and EVADNE together.

MRS. CARRILLON. Is that you, Dr. Hodges? Well, good-bye, I am just taking Evadne home.

EVADNE. Mother, why couldn't he drive with us? I have still lots more to say to him. He is going to help; yes, really help as an ally.

MRS. CARRILLON. Help? What with? Not some more mad schemes?

EVADNE. Mad to you, perhaps, but Dr. Hodges is going to help.

DR. HODGES. It is a case, Mrs. Carrillon, I fear, of we two against the rest of the world at present. I could not have a better, a braver ally.

EVADNE. An ally for the Flinkers against the Ostriches.

DR. HODGES. For the whole race against the Ostriches.

MRS. CARRILLON. Really, dear, what nonsense you are talking ; it sounds like another war.

EVADNE. It is.

EVADNE *lingers*.

MRS. CARRILLON. Oh, come along, Evadne.

Exit U stage door. HE stands C. SHE sits on table.

DR. HODGES. Why shouldn't the allies begin their help of the world by helpful kindness towards each other ?
(*Sits on table on her R.*)

EVADNE. Well, and why should they not ?

HE glances down at her hand, almost as though with the intention of kissing it. He notices the absence of the ring.

DR. HODGES. Your ring—is it gone ?

HE looks round so that the audience can see his face, which shows his relief, then hope, taking shape.

And I ran into Simplex—looking as though he'd been given a death sentence—(*more eagerly, a tone of passion beginning to be let loose*)—have you——

EVADNE (*slowly, as though loath to return to the thought of the past*). Ye—es——

DR. HODGES. Thank Heaven !

EVADNE *laughs*.

I mean—well I did hope you'd grow through that—entanglement——

EVADNE. Reginald was a dear—but—I *couldn't* make him understand ; every time we talked I felt as though I was trying to talk through a telephone that had been cut off—the person I was trying to talk to *wasn't there*.

DR. HODGES. *I'm here.*

THEY *exchange slow, deep and searching looks ; he reads an almost pathetic enquiry in her eyes, and soars to answer it.*

I long to tell you all you've made me think and feel these last two months. Somehow, you've made me see those Flinker homes through your eyes—with all their hurt wonder ; you've made me *feel* the misery I had only intellectually observed before——

EVADNE. I'm so glad.

DR. HODGES. Evadne—perhaps some day——

EVADNE. Two against the world—and for the world.

CURTAIN

